

# Aviation scholarship helps Iowa City teen soar to her dreams

## Local chapter of Experimental Aircraft Association participates for first time

IOWA CITY — Between classes at Iowa City High School and a part-time job at Culver's, Lizzie Peters can be found at the Jet Air Flight School working toward her private pilot's license.

The 17-year-old wants to be a military pilot and has her sights set on attending a military academy next year.

A scholarship from the Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 33 in East Central Iowa is putting her one step closer to achieving her dream. The award is "a lot of money put toward a license, which is super expensive," she said.

"I feel very fortunate, obviously. It's not something everyone can do. I feel grateful for my parents and everyone who's allowed me to fly with them," Peters said.

She began flight school in summer 2019, and already has flown on her own six times — an adrenaline rush, she said.

"The first solo is the first big step," said Justin Cook, president of the Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 33. "It's a momentous moment for a pilot when the flight instructor steps out of the aircraft, and 'I'm here alone. I can do it.' That's always a good, fun occasion. After that, you work on learning navigation."

The scholarship, which Peters was awarded in September, provides up to \$10,000 to complete her license.

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Chapter 33 is awarding one scholarship a year, and the new application process will begin in May 2021. Applicants have to complete a written essay and provide background information.

“We really want to know about their interest in aviation and what they want to do with it,” Cook said. Students can train at the flight school closest to them.

This is the first year the Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 33 has participated in the Ray Aviation Scholarship program.

The Ray Aviation Scholarship Fund is supported by the Ray Foundation and managed by the Experimental Aircraft Association to provide over \$1 million annually to students completing flight school.

The program has an over 80 percent success rate of students finishing their private pilot’s license within one year, Cook said.

Matt Wolford, vice president of Jet Air in Iowa City, said it’s important to start working toward a pilot’s license at a young age.

Wolford started working for Jet Air when he was a teenager, and he and his brothers all were flying solo by the time they were 16-years old. Three generations of his family are pilots.

“It’s a whole different world. It takes a different education, but it’s something people are passionate about,” Wolford said.

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The aviation industry has been seeing a shortage of commercial pilots, and the average age of a pilot is 45.

The scholarship program is a “phenomenal” way to get young people interested in aviation.

“It’s obviously not something everyone has the money to do,” Wolford said. “It’s expensive. A scholarship program to invest in someone who’s young like Lizzie is extremely valuable.”

Cook said the students who apply for the scholarship are “very engaged, high-achieving youth and the future of an aging industry.”

The coronavirus has presented a challenge to flight schools. It's impossible to social distance in a small plane, Wolford said.

"We encourage everyone to wear masks, unless it's going to create any issues," Wolford said. "Your No. 1 concern is flying the airplane safely."

Airplanes also are disinfected after use and have surprisingly good air flow, he said.

Peters said any student interested in aviation should apply for the scholarship.

"Go for it. Make sure it's something you're passionate about," she said.

"Flying is super freeing," she said. "Every time you go down the runway and everything goes by you so quick. When you drive, you have to stay in your lane, but when you fly, you can turn the power up."

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To apply for the scholarship, visit [EAA.org](http://EAA.org).

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