

# HORIZONS

Views and Perspectives from  
WEST MICHIGAN  
AVIATION ACADEMY

Winter 2019

## Students with Staying Power

It's every student's nightmare...you're a junior in high school and your family tells you, "We're moving." Who wants to go to a brand new school for their senior year?

Not Evelyn Kralt! Her reasons, however, are perhaps a little different than those of a typical teenager. Evelyn wanted to stay because she intends to become a pilot.

"My family is originally from Ontario," she says. "We moved to the United States 10 years ago, but my dad's work took him back at the end of my junior year. Quebec students end their high school education in 11th grade and then spend two years in a pre-university school called a CEGEP. If I had gone back with my family, I would have been in limbo. I would not have a high school degree from either country, and I would not be able to start college, either."

So Evelyn and her family agreed that she could stay in Grand Rapids to finish school and fulfill her dream of earning a private pilot license. That dream started when Evelyn was in middle school. "I attended a camp for girls interested in STEM, sponsored by Grand Valley State University," she recalls. "We toured WMAA, rode in a small plane, flew the simulators and saw the radio-controlled planes in the air. I was hooked!"

Evelyn applied for and received a spot through the admissions lottery. Since the staff knew about her passion for flying, they gave her an incentive flight award her freshman year. "The instructor let me fly when we were up there, and I couldn't stop grinning!" she remembers. Now in her senior year, Evelyn goes up in a plane 1-3 times per week. She just earned her "white shirt" for completing a solo flight, and she's proud to wear it!

She's been involved in the radio-controlled flight club since her freshman year, and this year she was elected as the club's first female president. "The RC club is a fantastic opportunity to spend time with the aviation instructors," she says. "You learn basic stuff about planes, like aerodynamics, but you also get to interact with the staff and older student mentors. Now, as a senior, I'm instructing younger students. I'm learning leadership skills, both as the president of the club and as a mentor."

Evelyn is committed to her education and to WMAA. "Yes, it's hard to be separated from my family, but this is where I should be and I'm doing what I want to do."

"We toured WMAA, rode in a small plane, flew the simulators and saw the radio-controlled planes in the air. I was hooked!" Evelyn Kralt



Evelyn Kralt wearing her "white shirt" and proud of it!



“How does an English Learner student succeed? Personal determination plays a huge role. But the secret ingredient is the teachers and the culture at WMAA.”

Raya Womack, English Learner Program Coordinator



## The Language of Determination

So imagine that you’ve just landed at Gerald R. Ford Airport. You’ve never set foot in the United States...in fact, you don’t even speak English. As you are leaving the airport complex, you see West Michigan Aviation Academy and decide that’s where you want to go to school!

Don’t laugh...it has happened. Victoire was a Congolese refugee with a passion for engineering. He graduated from WMAA, was accepted at Western University and is now studying aerospace engineering. But he’s not alone.

“We have approximately 70 students participating in the English Learner (EL) program,” says coordinator Raya Womack. “We started the program in 2013, when we realized that our student body included refugees, immigrants, and kids whose primary home language is something other than English.”

How does an English Learner student succeed? Personal determination plays a huge role. But the secret ingredient is the teachers and the culture at WMAA. “We couldn’t ask for a better staff,” declares Raya. “The teachers are always willing to explore different strategies that will surround and support these students.”

WMAA offers a vast array of resources for English learners. “Our classroom is open to students all day,” says Raya. “We have specific classes for students who

### Languages Spoken by WMAA EL Students

Arabic  
 French  
 Indonesian  
 Kinyawranda  
 Liberian Creole  
 Luganda  
 Mandigo  
 Persian  
 Polish  
 Portugese  
 Somali and/or  
 Somali Mai Mai  
 Spanish  
 Swahili  
 Vietnamese

are newcomers to the U.S. These include teaching about social norms, emergency communication, email, organization and other life skills. We provide English Language Development classes to teach vocabulary, reading and writing. Students come here to take tests and quizzes if they need more time or support. They set personal goals for areas in which they want to spend extra time. In addition to myself, we also have a multilingual para-pro on the team who can call home to explain things like credits and grades.”

It’s hard for people who have lived here all their lives to understand what it’s like for a newcomer. Raya shares some incredible stories. “We’ve had students get their first pair of shoes here, and taste their first ice cream cone. We took a student to Lake Michigan because he had never seen a lake before. You should have seen the joy on his face! I had a student who never smiled...until he learned to make pancakes!”

WMAA does receive additional funding (Title 3) to help offset the cost of supporting English learners. But the heart and soul of the staff is what really encourages these students to succeed. “I’ve had students come here because they heard about our school in an African refugee camp,” says Raya. “Students spread the word that WMAA is a great school. The kids choose to come here because they want to work hard, get an education, and fulfill the American dream.”



There’s joy on the face of this English Learner student experiencing Lake Michigan for the first time!



## Mark Your Calendar!

Our annual **Leaders of Tomorrow Gala on May 16, 2019** provides an exciting way for you to connect with West Michigan Aviation Academy. Our theme this year is "Inspiring Lifelong Leaders," and we know you won't want to miss it.

### Highlights of the evening include:

- An insider's look at the Amway aviation hangar and aircraft owned by our major sponsors.
- An inspiring presentation by Major Dan Rooney of the U.S. Air Force. Major Rooney is a fighter pilot, PGA tour player, patriotic philanthropist and author.
- Demonstrations by students and interactive stations that allow you to share learning experiences with them.
- Announcements about upcoming developments for our students, staff, and the community that we serve.
- An experience-based silent auction that will support our Glider program.

Your generous support of the **Leaders of Tomorrow Gala** provides enhanced aviation and engineering-related educational activities that exceed our per-pupil state funding. We use these funds to enrich students through off-site visits, capstone trips, robotics teams, flight experiences, and new student orientation. We also support capital and maintenance needs, such as engineering equipment, flight simulators, and our two Cessna 172 aircraft.

*Event underwritten by Gulfstream Aerospace.  
VIP Reception sponsored by Delta Air Lines.*

## Take a Tour & See What Your Support Can Do!

Want to learn more about how your support can help our students? Join us for a **Soaring Together** tour. Please contact Kelsea Wierenga at least one week in advance to reserve your spot. All tours begin at 8:30am and last for one hour.

### Upcoming Tour Dates

**February 26**  
**March 7**  
**April 9 & 30**  
**May 30**



### SPONSORSHIPS

Influence our 1,000+ attendees through your sponsorship. We offer many different options to suit your needs.

Please contact Meggan George  
[mgeorge@westmichiganaviation.org](mailto:mgeorge@westmichiganaviation.org)  
or (616) 446-8886 x 112  
for more information.

### ATTENDANCE

Please visit our website or contact Kelsea Wierenga  
[kwierenga@westmichiganaviation.org](mailto:kwierenga@westmichiganaviation.org)  
or (616) 446-8886 x 136  
for more information  
and to register.



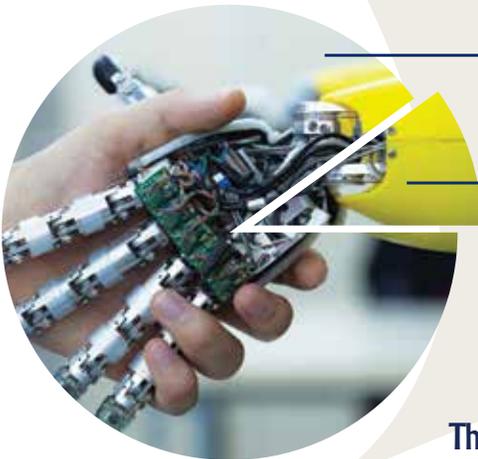


WEST MICHIGAN  
AVIATION ACADEMY

Development Office  
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## Soaring Together

This school creates amazing and unparalleled opportunities for students. The per-pupil allotment we receive from the State as a charter school is not nearly enough to cover the true cost of our programs. Donors like you make it possible to provide the exposure and experiences that produce thriving, well-prepared high school graduates each year. We invite you to get on board with us by committing to an annual gift. Learn more by contacting us, or check out the Development Office online.



→ **90%**  
State funding for  
core subjects

→ **10%**  
Philanthropy to fund  
advanced programs  
(Aviation, STEM, Robotics)

### The Development Office Role:

- Fill the gap between state funding and actual cost
- Secure additional funds to advance our quality and mission

### Community Partners

**Biggby Coffee**

(2700 Kraft Avenue)

**Foremost Graphics Group**

(2921 Wilson Drive NW)

**Marco New American Bistro**

(884 Forest Hill Avenue SE)

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