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EAA AirVenture Today

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About EAA AirVenture Today

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Women Soar helps girls' career options take flight

By Barbara A. Schmitz

In 1971, a Connecticut judge said that athletic competitions build character for boys. But you don't need that character in girls.

That type of thinking is the reason behind Women Soar, a two-day program meant to get teenage girls interested in aviation and related occupations.

Held Sunday night and Monday at the EAA AirVenture Museum, the program paired 26 mentors of various aviation backgrounds with 90 young women interested in aviation and other science-related careers. The overlaying theme: Anything is possible if you dream.

"Aviation is a motivation that plants seeds that become memories for decisions of the future," said Elissa Lines, EAA vice president of development. "But your path is made easier because of their efforts," she



Women Soar speaker and journalist/author Martha Ackmann speaks to the group about her book The Mercury 13. Photo by Phil Weston

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told the girls about the mentors.

The event included opportunities for the girls to meet in small groups with mentors to learn more about careers and a chance to hear Women Airforce Service Pilots talk about their role in World War II. They also spoke via telephone with Anousheh Ansari, a member of the X Prize Foundation's Vision Circle; she is in Moscow training to be an astronaut and fly to the International Space Station.

Suzanne Darcy-Hennemann, a 777 senior test pilot for Boeing Engineering Flight Test and the first woman to be named a Boeing production test pilot, said she agreed to be a mentor because she felt a need to give back. Her main message to young women was simple: "Whatever you can dream you can do. It doesn't matter if it's aviation or another field, but if it makes you passionate, do it."

Amy Laboda, Editor in Chief of *Aviation for Women*, said she enjoys talking to the young women and answering questions. And one thing she stresses—careers often morph into other careers so you need to keep your options open.

And while this was Laboda's second year as a mentor, it was a special one because her 14-year-old daughter, Leah Marz, was a participant.

Leah, of Fort Meyers, Florida, said she came to Women Soar for a very simple reason: "Because my mom signed me up." But she was excited about coming so she could meet some females in the engineering track. "I take engineering classes in school, but I'm with a bunch of boys. We build machines and make them fly. We build bridges and crash them."

"They really like crashing them," Laboda adds. "She hasn't brought anything home yet."

Leah, who just returned from a weeklong soaring camp, said she enjoys aviation simply because of tradition. "It's like the farm boy who grows up on the farm and decides to be a farmer. It's part of my life."

"Whatever you can dream you can do. It doesn't matter if it's aviation or another field, but if it makes you passionate, do it."

– Suzanne Darcy-Hennemann

Kara Swensen, founder and president of Alaris Aviation, one of the leading aircraft brokerage companies in the country, said she agreed to be a mentor, knowing there are few female mentors in aviation. "Every single role model I had growing up was a guy.

There's nothing wrong with that, but it is important for girls to also have some females that they can look up to."

Swensen encouraged the girls to think outside the box. "There are many more jobs in aviation other than just being a pilot," she says. You need to find your passion and turn that into a career."

Chelsey Hintze, 16, of Oshkosh, was back for her second year at Women Soar, this year bringing along two friends. She says she signed up to meet motivational woman. "It's a great way to see opportunities you have when you're interested in science," she says.

That's exactly why Karly Schmidt, 15, of Knox, Indiana, signed up for Women Soar. "I wanted to learn more about my options," she says.

Michelle DeVillers, 12, of Kalamazoo, Michigan, says she wanted to learn about jobs that are normally done by men. She plans to pursue aviation as a hobby, and is thinking she'll become a marine biologist.

Darcy-Hennemann told the girls they are all in the right place. "We all welcome you. All the women here have worked really hard so you have this opportunity."

She gave the girls some simple rules for success. Set your goals. If you can dream it, you can do it. Write your goals down. Take one step at a time. If someone criticizes you, listen. If there is truth in the criticism apply it and move forward.

But the most important may be the last piece of advice. "When you reach your goal, you are not done," she says. "You need to reach out your hand and help someone else who is coming your way."

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