

Expanding Opportunities in Aviation

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

new executive director of the program, located in the former the Albina Youth Opportunity School on North Mississippi Avenue. The instruction young people get about airplanes is geared to give them opportunities for success in the aviation field.

Cannell's father is a good example, she said. He came from humble beginnings, but a ride in an airplane changed his life and sparked his interest in flying. He learned to fly and was a pilot for Northwest Airlines for 30 years.

Cannell wants more kids to get exposure to flying as well.

"My hope is that kids find their passion through aerospace," she said. "There are incredible opportunities in this field, and the goal is to reach as many kids as we can through our community partners, encouraging kids to learn what they can about aviation and aerospace and to try things out."

Aviation is the art or science of making and flying aircraft, while aeronautics is the design, construction, mathematics and mechanics of aircraft and other flying objects.

Both pursuits require a background in science, technology, engineering and math, known as STEM, Cannell said, subject areas that are taught with hands-on opportunities at Airway Science for Kids. Thanks to charitable donations, the classes are free to students.

ASK was founded in 1991 by Bob Strickland, a retired Air Force auditor, Cannell said.

"He had a love and passion for aviation and cared deeply about kids of color," she said. "He knew a lot our young people were falling through the cracks, with gangs and other distraction, and he wanted to make a positive impact by sparking an interest in STEM through aviation."

You don't have to be a pilot to get a good job in aviation. Other jobs in the field include aerospace engineer, air traffic controller, aircraft maintenance, aviation management, aviation safety, aviation transport, flight instructors, civil and military aviation, and even cabin crew.

At least 2,000 kids have been through the ASK program over the years, Cannell. Sixty percent were kids of color, she said, and at least 20 percent were girls.

"We don't turn any young person away and our focus is on kids of color and girls," she said.

STEM is the fastest growing field in the state and it's also one of the most lucrative fields for future careers, but there is a disparity because of the relatively small number of women and



PHOTO BY BEVERLY CORBELL/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

McKenzie Reid, 18, a senior at Lincoln High, said the Airway Science for Kids program is helping her prepare for a career as an aerospace engineer.

people of color pursuing math and science based vocations.

So the goal is not necessarily for the students to become pilots, although many do, Cannell said, "Our hope and passion is that they explore learning in STEM-related fields and go on to have careers that are both professional and lucrative for them."

The mission at ASK is to not only offer aviation and aeronautics training, but to convince local youth that it's not outside their reach and they can do anything they set their minds to.

"As Bob Strickland used to say, 'Your attitude determines your altitude,'" she said. "So many young people are reinforced that they can't do certain things. We attempt to deconstruct all of that and teach them that if you can learn to set a course for the Aurora Airport – whether it's on a simulator or in a real airplane – if you can build a drone and fly a drone, if you can build an airplane, then nothing can stop you from realizing your potential."

Learning to build drones and pilot them is a great job opportunity, Cannell said, and the biggest drone companies in the U.S., Northwest UAV, is located in McMinnville.

The ASK building, which the nonprofit has leased for two years and now owns, needs much work to make the space more ef-

ficient and useful, Cannell said.

ASK acquired the building, through a loan from a donor, from the Northwest Health Foundation, which bought the building when the Albina Youth school was going defunct, she said.

"They wanted to make sure it stayed in the community and the property did not get redeveloped into high rises, and they deserve a lot of credit."

But a lot of work still needs to be done and ASK is going to kick off a capital campaign soon to remake the school into it a modern educational facility and repay the loan. The building needs to be thoroughly cleaned, old furniture removed, classrooms renovated and much more.

Renovations will probably take a couple of years, Cannell said, and she's hoping to form partnerships with developers and foundations.

"We're hoping to get the community excited because it's right on Mississippi, the heart of the black community," she said. "What better homage to those who came before us to making sure we have a permanent home for our young people to get exposed to STEM and CTE (career and technical education) right there on Mississippi."

ASK is asking for in-kind support from builders and developers in the short term and financial partners for the long term "so we

can have something the community is proud of," she said.

"We're hoping to have a community center where people can gather and maybe put affordable housing on top," she said. "And we could have programs downstairs where little black and brown kids are learning how to fly airplanes, how to build drones and really get excited about math and science."

But it can't happen without community support, she said.

"Our program has been going on for almost 30 years and we want to continue for another 30 years," she said. "But in order to do so, it will take the community, the whole community, rallying behind us."

Cannell grew up in north and northeast Portland, she said, and graduated from Benson High School.

"What this is about, to me, is giving back to the community that has given me so much."

A celebration of the work of ASK, "ASK Wings to Soar Celebration," will be held at OMSI, the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, at 6 p.m. on April 8 for a reception and dinner with a program emceed by current and former students and followed by a dance party.

To learn more about Airway Science for Kids, and to register for the "Ask Wings to Soar Celebration," go to the ASK website at wpl.airwayscience.org.



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