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Tuskegee Airmen to Receive the 2021 Clifford Henderson Trophy

Washington, DC, April 5, 2021 – The National Aeronautic Association (NAA) is pleased to announce that the Tuskegee Airmen have been selected as the recipient of the 2021 Clifford Henderson Trophy.

The Henderson Trophy, which is in the collection of the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum, was established in 1960 to honor the creator and Managing Director of the world-renowned National Air Races from 1928-1939. Clifford Henderson’s work stimulated a generation’s interest in aviation and challenged the state of the art in aviation development.

The trophy is awarded to “...a living individual, group of individuals, or an organization whose vision, leadership or skill made a significant and lasting contribution to the promotion and advancement of aviation and aerospace in the United States.”

Previous recipients of the Clifford Henderson Trophy include Colonel Joseph Kittinger, Marion Blakey, The United States Air Force Academy, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Lieutenant General James H. Doolittle, Senator Barry M. Goldwater, Scott Crossfield, the Ninety-Nines, and the 2020 recipient – Dr. Peggy Chabrian, Founder of Women in Aviation, International.

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first black military aviators in the U.S. Army Air Corps (the predecessor to the modern-day U.S. Air Force). In 1941, with the start of World War II imminent, it was decided to offer training to African Americans as pilots, mechanics, and support staff. The new air base in Tuskegee, Alabama, became the center of the training program for over 14,000 black air personnel. First with the 99th Fighter Squadron and later with the 332nd Fighter Group, the Tuskegee Airmen made significant contributions to the war effort, serving in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. Collectively, the airmen flew over 15,000 individual sorties throughout the war, earning 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, and encouraging the eventual integration of the U.S. armed forces in 1948.

“The Tuskegee Airmen served their country with bravery and skill,” expressed NAA President, Greg Principato. “And then, refusing to be defeated at home by a country that did not always appreciate them, came together to educate generations of students and fellow Americans to help

form our more perfect Union. The contributions of the Tuskegee Airmen to their country and to our history will live on for centuries.”

“The Tuskegee Airmen are excited to be recognized with the presentation of the 2021 Clifford Henderson Trophy and to be a part of the long list of aviation pioneers recognized by the National Aeronautic Association,” said Jerry Burton, National President, Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. “The World War II record and accomplishments of the Tuskegee Airmen are legendary and this award will be a part of the legacy.”

The Henderson Trophy for 2021 will be presented when health and safety protocols allow. For more information, please visit www.naa.aero.

The National Aeronautic Association is a non-profit membership organization devoted to fostering opportunities to participate fully in aviation activities and to promoting public understanding of the importance of aviation and space flight to the United States. NAA is the caretaker of some of the most important aviation awards in the world, and certifies all national aviation records set in the United States. For information, visit www.naa.aero.

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