



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Aviation Volunteers and Organizations Honored for Public Benefit Flying**

**Washington, DC, October 7, 2021** – The National Aeronautic Association (NAA), in partnership with the Air Care Alliance (ACA), a nationwide league of humanitarian flying organizations, is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2021 Public Benefit Flying Awards. These awards were created to honor volunteer pilots, other volunteers, and organizations engaged in flying to help others, as well as those supporting such work. This year’s recipients are:

#### **Distinguished Volunteer Pilot:**

**Michael Burks** joined Angel Flight West in 2017 and has served selflessly as a volunteer pilot and wing leader for the state of Montana. He has flown 266 missions in four years, becoming the most frequent flier in his state, transporting children and adults with serious medical conditions to receive vital treatment that might otherwise be inaccessible. Michael has gone above and beyond to personally finance projects to promote public benefit flying across the country, including funding a documentary titled “Angels Do Fly West.” Michael’s extraordinary advocacy, deep drive, and generosity have made a profound impact on his community and the families he serves.

**Mark Hanson** began volunteering as a pilot with Patient AirLift Services (PALS) in 2010 and later joined the board of directors. Since then, Mark has flown over 300 volunteer flights, becoming a go-to pilot, picking up hard-to-fill and last-minute requests for free medical and compassion flights for patients and veterans. He is a passenger favorite and creates meaningful relationships with those he flies. When the global pandemic put a temporary stop on passenger flights in 2020, Mark did not hesitate to find opportunities to be of service. He was instrumental in forming a partnership with the Be the Match Foundation and the Air Care Alliance to utilize volunteer pilots to deliver blood products for life-saving bone marrow transplants nationwide.

#### **Distinguished Volunteer:**

**Troy Whistman** is a volunteer pilot, board member, and wing leader for Angel Flight South Central (AFSC). He also volunteers for Pilots N Paws and Challenge Air, flying any type of mission that is needed, with his compassion and devotion evident during every

flight. Troy strives to build a sense of unity among volunteer pilots and is committed to growing AFSC's presence in the community. He has coordinated and participated in fly-ins, organized Facebook fundraisers, served on the planning committee for AFSC's gala, helped to streamline the organization's communications strategies, and partnered with a well-known YouTube channel to produce a video featuring AFSC. Troy's infectious enthusiasm for charitable aviation has benefited the public benefit flying community as a whole and those they serve.

### **Outstanding Achievement in Advancement of Public Benefit Flying:**

While the onset of COVID-19 shut down most of the country, cancer unfortunately did not take a break. **Corporate Angel Network (CAN)** was faced with the challenge of creating innovative solutions to continue to fulfill its mission of transporting cancer patients to and from treatment. Almost overnight, CAN effectively lost its most valuable resource, unused seats on corporate aircraft, and quickly pivoted to utilizing maintenance, proficiency, and dedicated flights to transport patients. Working in lockstep with its participating companies, CAN established COVID-19 protocols and precautions to ensure the safety of every passenger and crew member on board. CAN successfully persevered in the face of the challenges created by the pandemic and continues to fulfill their 40-year mission of facilitating a path for the business aviation community to help cancer patients in critical need.

### **Champion of Public Benefit Flying:**

Since 2017, air carrier **JSX** has donated hundreds of flights in partnership with Angel Flight West (AFW), to help countless patients make their way to critical medical care that may have otherwise been unreachable. JSX's commitment to charitable aviation was further illustrated in 2020 and 2021. While the airline industry world-wide experienced devastating effects from the global pandemic, JSX fully maintained their schedule of donated flights, helping many families during a critical time of need. Additionally, JSX actively seeks out opportunities to best leverage their resources to support organizations within the public benefit flying community. The organization's commitment and generosity to AFW, the beneficiaries, communities, and organizations that make up charitable aviation deserves to be recognized and celebrated.

### **Teamwork Award:**

**All Volunteer Pilots and Organizations Working to Fly Pandemic Relief Missions Supporting the COVID-19 Response During 2020 and 2021.** In 2020 and continuing into 2021, the devastating COVID-19 pandemic wreaked fear and havoc across the globe. Volunteer pilot groups across the country put a hold on their operations and began flying pandemic related relief supplies, test kits, and vaccines to remote communities to ensure rapid delivery. Hundreds of volunteers from public benefit flying and other groups created a large relief network, providing critical aid to communities large and small throughout the country. Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to these volunteers and

organizations who embodied the spirit of self-sacrifice and teamwork to help our fellow citizens during a time of great devastation and need.

“The toughest times often bring out the best in people and it is hard to imagine a tougher time than a global pandemic,” said NAA President Greg Principato. “Those we honor today stepped up at a difficult time to help others who needed it. The aviation community has an amazing history of stepping up. I not only congratulate this year’s Public Benefit Flying awardees I also thank them for all they’ve done and will do.”

Members of the 2021 Public Benefit Flying Selection Committee were Linda Daschle, LHD & Associates, Inc; Larry Forney, 2019 Distinguished Volunteer Pilot recipient; Scott Gloyna, 2020 Distinguished Volunteer Pilot recipient; Jim Hesseman, ACA; Kristina Luke, ACA; Rol Murrow, ACA; and Charlie Tillett, 2020 Distinguished Volunteer Pilot recipient.

The Public Benefit Flying Awards will be presented at the NAA Fall Awards Dinner on December 6, 2021 in Arlington, Virginia. For more information, please visit [www.naa.aero](http://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](http://www.naa.aero).*

*The Air Care Alliance is a nonprofit public service organization supporting the work of dozens of volunteer-based charitable organizations whose members fly to help others. ACA is devoted to fostering, enhancing, and promoting public benefit flying in the United States and other countries. For information, visit [www.aircarealliance.org](http://www.aircarealliance.org).*

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