Mary S. Feik Wins Brewer Trophy

In recognition of over 65 years of personal and professional dedication to aviation education as a teacher, mentor, innovator, pilot, engineer and leader to America’s youth, Colonel Mary S. Feik has been awarded the 2006 Frank G. Brewer Trophy.

The Brewer Trophy is awarded annually by the National Aeronautic Association to an individual, a group of individuals, or an organization for significant contributions of enduring value to aerospace education in the United States.

“To be given such an honor as the Brewer award for something that you’ve enjoyed for so many years is simply awesome,” says Feik. “If you’ve had a career with so much joy in it and met so many wonderful people in it, then to be honored and recognized for all that joy on top of everything… it’s just tremendous.”

A childhood barnstorming ride in a Curtiss Jenny when she was just seven years old, combined with her father’s instruction in mechanics and his mantra, “Aim high and follow your dreams,” eventually led Feik to a job as a teenager working in an aircraft maintenance shop. That was followed by a long career, teaching aircraft maintenance and mechanics for the U.S. Army Air Forces at Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio. She is credited with becoming the first woman engineer in research and development in the Air Technical Service Command Division and much later, in 1996, became the first woman to earn the Charles Taylor Master Mechanics Award.

Feik flew more than 6,000 hours as a pilot in fighter, attack, bomber, cargo and training aircraft to determine flight maintenance, safety training requirements and also qualified as a B-29 Flight Engineer. In 2004, she received the Civil Air Patrol Distinguished Service Medal and was promoted to the rank of Colonel.

She was also responsible for designing and building the first Captivair, an experimental prototype training device for pilots using operational aircraft on pylons that could quickly be returned to air service after serving as training aids. Her prototype became a standard design used on many different high-performance fighter aircraft and foreshadowed the development of the flight simulators and other training devices in use today.

Feik worked for the National Air and Space Museum for ten years, first as a docent in the museum on the National Mall, then as a Restoration Specialist at the museum’s Paul E. Garber Restoration Facility. She now restores historic aircraft and teaches restoration techniques for
antique and classic aircraft to young people and aviation club members. In addition to conducting aircraft maintenance and airplane fabric workshops for youth, Feik spends much of her time traveling – at her own expense – to speak with youth and leaders at college campuses, museums and aviation organizations and is a member of the Careers in Aviation Board.

Common themes in her teaching include the values instilled in her by her father and her military colleagues: Teamwork, the importance of technical training, and pride in workmanship.

Feik has received many honors in her long and storied career, including three Civil Air Patrol Regional Brewer awards. In 2003, she was named among the “100 most influential women in aviation and aerospace industries over the last 100 years” by Women in Aviation International. As of December 2002, all Civil Air Patrol cadets working towards the rank of Cadet Senior Airman are awarded the Mary S. Feik Achievement, the third achievement in the cadet program.

“So much of this – all these tremendous honors – is so far beyond the purview of what I might have ever thought was possible at various points throughout my life,” says Feik. “The real honor however,… it’s the kids. My legacy is going to be the youngsters that I have either taught or that I have influenced in one way or another. As far as I’m concerned, there isn’t a greater honor. There just isn’t.”

Look for a full interview with Col. Mary S. Feik in an upcoming issue of AERO Magazine. The 2006 Brewer Award will be awarded to Feik later this year – check the Web site for more information.

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