AEROCOM

JOHN D. ODEGARD SCHOOL OF AEROSPACE SCIENCES

SUMMER 2025

UND
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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ON THE COVER

UND Aerobatics showing off the top of their new Super Decathalon while flying inverted during a June practice in Grafton.

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MEET OUR CONTRIBUTORS

ARJUN JAGADA ‘25

Arjun Jagada is a flight instructor and supervisor of flight at UND Aerospace. He is also a board member of the Laura Taber Barbour Air Safety Foundation. Originally from Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, he graduated with triple majors in Commercial Aviation, Aviation Management, and Aviation Safety and Operations this spring. Arjun has held a variety of leadership roles at the university, including President of the Student Aerospace Advisory Council, Vice President of the Student Aviation Management Association, and Student Ambassador in the Aerospace Dean’s Office. Additionally, Arjun has expressed his passion for aviation through photography, capturing the spirit and operations of UND Aerospace as our lead photographer for the past three years.

AVERIE EIXENBERGER

Averie Eixenberger is a junior at the University of North Dakota, where she is pursuing degrees in Commercial Aviation and English. Originally from Idaho, she previously earned an Associate of Arts in General Studies from Idaho State University. Averie is deeply engaged in campus life, actively participating in various student organizations, and has recently been elected President of UND’s Chapter of Women in Aviation. During her freshman year, she launched her own podcasting business, Rosethorn Productions, and continues to grow it alongside her academic pursuits. For the past two years, she has been a writer for JDOSAS, where she combines her passions for storytelling and aviation. Averie aspires to become an airline pilot while also contributing to the field of aviation journalism.

Welcome to the summer 2025 issue of Aerocom!

We're excited to share some incredible developments at UND Aerospace. First, a heartfelt thank you to everyone who supported the launch of our new Flight Operations Building and Hangar. We broke ground at the end of May, and construction is now underway with an anticipated opening in January 2027. This issue includes more details about the project and how you can still get involved in shaping the future of UND Aerospace.

At the end of June, we welcomed home the UND Frozen Force Air Race Classic team from winning the intercollegiate class in the Air Race Classic. This is the first UND win in this event, adding to the growing list of UND national championships.

In other exciting news—UND is officially in space! While our students and faculty have contributed to projects aboard the International Space Station in the past, we now have our own satellites in orbit. In late June, SpaceX successfully launched and deployed two UND satellites as part of the Rendezvous and Operations for Autonomous Docking and Servicing mission. Our students will guide these satellites to locate and dock with each other, marking a new era for our Space Studies and Engineering programs.

Our Air Traffic Management program has reached a major milestone, graduating its first cohort under the enhanced Collegiate Training Initiative. Students who score highly on assessments can now proceed directly to ATC tower positions. This advancement is already driving increased interest in the program, and we're continuing to invest in upgraded equipment and simulators.

During the recent North Dakota legislative session, we secured funding to expand the UND Center for Aerospace Research and Medicine, enhancing support for pilots and air traffic controllers across the state. We also signed a new agreement with the FAA's Civil Aerospace Medical Institute to help improve the broader aviation medical system.

In Earth System Science & Policy, we welcome Dr. Jeff VanLooy as the new department chair, succeeding Dr. Soizik Laguette, who has provided outstanding leadership for many years. We're grateful for her contributions and excited to work with Jeff moving forward.

Our Uncrewed Aerial Systems team continues to lead in national security efforts, collaborating with U.S. Customs & Border Protection, the U.S. Air Force, and the North Dakota National Guard on counter-drone initiatives. These projects not only serve critical agencies but also prepare our students for impactful careers.

In Atmospheric Sciences, Dr. Aaron Kennedy has returned from his Fulbright fellowship in Iceland and will now serve as associate chair. We're also in the process of remodeling classrooms and labs to better support student learning and research.

Finally, our students and alumni continue to lead across UND and the aerospace industry. In this issue, you'll read about some of their remarkable achievements, including those of our competition teams.

Thank you for your continued support. We hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to hearing from you!

ROBERT KRAUS | DEAN, JOHN D. ODEGARD SCHOOL OF AEROSPACE SCIENCES

UPCOMING EVENTS

JULY

21-27 EAA AirVenture - Oshkosh, WI

23 UND Aerospace Alumni & Industry Reception - Oshkosh, WI

AUGUST

6-8 OBAP 49th Annual Conference - Tacoma, WA

SEPTEMBER

2-6 Potato Bowl - Grand Forks, ND

15-20 UND Homecoming - Grand Forks, ND

15-17 NATC Communicating for Safety (CFS) - Las Vegas, NV

18-20 Latin Aerospace Industry EXPO 2025 - Orlando, FL

OCTOBER

4 View UND Aerospace Saturday - Open House - Grand Forks, ND

14 Faces of the Industry - Grand Forks, ND

14 Alumni & Industry Reception during NBAA-BACE - Las Vegas, NV

NOVEMBER

5-6 Space Operations Summit - Grand Forks, ND

10 Aviation Mental Health Symposium - Montréal, Canada

DECEMBER

19 Winter Commencement - Grand Forks, ND

LEADER IN AEROSPACE

ASHLEY WESTPHAL, '07, '09
VP of Domestic Pricing & Revenue Management at Delta

Ashley Westphal cannot remember a time in her life when she was not drawn to aviation. Originally from St. Thomas, North Dakota, a small town near the borders with Canada and Minnesota, she began her training on her private pilot's license while in high school.

"My grandfather served in the military," Westphal explained. "While we didn't travel often, when we did get a chance to go visit my grandparents, I remembered loving the plane and the airport as much as I loved the destination. When I was in high school, I started pursuing my private pilot's license, and the rest was history."

When she chose to attend UND, she originally wanted to become a commercial pilot. However, she discovered a passion for Aviation Management, hoping to work for the airlines. She earned her bachelor's degree in 2007 and continued her education at UND, pursuing her M.B.A.

"UND really does an amazing job of giving you a very well-rounded perspective and preparing you for a role in the airline industry," she stated. "The fact that I had at least some understanding of the operational side of the business, the commercial side of the business, and the government constructs in which the industry resides has really helped me understand how my and my team's decisions could have downline impacts that could affect the business in unintended ways. Over the years, I've also seen how faculty and alumni support one another, and that's been an amazing contributor to my career as well."

After graduating from UND in 2009, Westphal went to work at Delta Air Lines as an analyst in inventory management. She has spent 16 years at Delta, working in various areas, with a focus on revenue management, both domestically and internationally. As her responsibilities grew, she gained a reputation for being well-rounded and focused on people's leadership. Now, Westphal works as the Vice President of Domestic Pricing and Revenue Management at Delta Air Lines.

"I'm currently responsible for Delta's revenue generation for the U.S. domestic market and Canada," said Westphal. "My primary responsibility is leading the revenue management function, but as you can imagine, revenue generation touches all parts of the business, so I'm constantly engaged with people around the organization to ensure we're generating the best outcome for Delta."

In her various roles, Westphal has focused her efforts on improving the experiences of the people around her. As an advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion at Delta, she helped launch an organization called "We Lead," which focuses on improving the commercial employee experience for everyone.

"I'm really proud of that work and what we've accomplished over the last 5 years," Westphal expressed. "My biggest accomplishments are when I see my people grow and get to where they want to be in their careers. There's nothing more important than investing in people, and seeing that come to fruition makes me incredibly proud. By far, the most exciting part of my work is the people I get to work with."

Outside of work, Westphal stated that she spends a lot of her time on the soccer fields of Georgia, supporting her daughter. She expressed her love of traveling and how she enjoys sharing that experience with family.

"This isn't very original for someone who works in the airline industry, but I was a wanderer at heart even before I was lucky enough to land at Delta," she stated. "I love exploring the world, and it's been such a gift to pass that love of travel and experience onto my 14-year-old daughter."

In the future, Westphal is open to new and different opportunities in her career. She continues to look for experiences that align with her values and will allow her to grow.

"I had a general sense of what revenue management entailed, but I had no idea how much I'd enjoy it," she recalled. "I've been here for 16 years, and the work is so dynamic that I'm still learning new things nearly every day. I know I want to continue stretching and growing, and I have no idea where that path will lead, but I'm going to continue to focus on people and Delta along the way."

1ST PLACE FOR OUR AIR RACE CLASSIC TEAM

The UND Air Race Classic Team, also known as "The Frozen Force," is comprised of four female pilots who are either students or flight instructors at UND. For the first time since establishing a team in 2013, UND's 2025 Frozen Force has won 1st place in the intercollegiate class, receiving zero penalties! This year's team includes Pilot Helena Lind, Copilot Charlotte Fuller, Navigator Caroline Kelley, and Ground Coordinator Aubrey Baril. The 2025 Air Race Classic started on June 17th in Fairhope, AL, and finished in Spokane, WA, on June 22nd. Support the team and follow along their journey on social media, **@UNDairraceclassicteam** or **airraceclassic.org**.

1ST PLACE FOR OUR FAA DATA CHALLENGE TEAM

A UND team of three aviators created an AI-powered system designed to help air traffic controllers identify hazardous attitudes in pilots and communicate more effectively during high-stress situations. In March, the team traveled to Washington, DC, to present their research at the FAA Data Challenge's final showcase—where they earned first place! The winning team, comprised of UND students Caroline Kelley, Zachary Hoff, and Andie Akenson, along with their faculty advisor, Brandon Wild, brought home a reward of $25,000 for the University.

2ND PLACE FOR THE UND FLYING TEAM

The UND Flying Team continues to be a top competitor at the National Intercollegiate Flying Association's (NIFA) National Championship. This year, at the 2025 SAFECON competition, the team earned 2nd place overall out of 30 universities competing. Additionally, amongst more than 350 aviators, UND team member Matthew Cleveland took "Top Pilot" and "Top Scoring Contestant"—a remarkable achievement and testament to his hard work and skill developed through UND's aviation program.

SCRAPBOOKS REVEAL LIVES OF UND'S FIRST TWO WOMEN AVIATION STUDENTS

With World War II on the horizon, two friends at UND pursued dreams of flying, as recently opened scrapbooks show

It was July 28, 1943, when 22-year-old Kathryn "Kay" Lawrence — the first woman to graduate from UND with a pilot's license — wrote a letter to her best friend, Marcy (Gilbertson) Schoenecker, who was living in Salina, Kan.

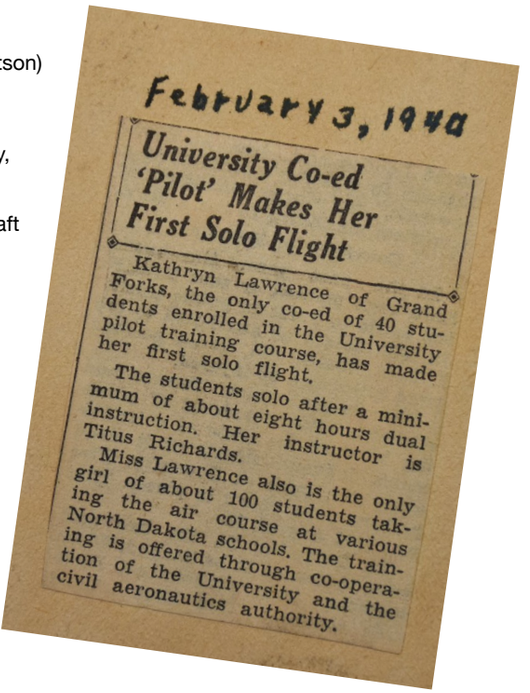
The U.S. was well into its second year of World War II against the Axis powers of Germany, Japan, and Italy. Kay was in her fourth week of training at Sweetwater, Texas, with the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), a group of volunteers formed to ferry military aircraft from factories to air bases with the intention of freeing up male pilots for combat duty.

Relating her experiences to Marcy, she noted the strictness of the instructor pilots and mentioned that four women cadet pilots had already "washed out" of the flight training program.

Kay then added: "I'm working my head silly, so if there's any possibility of me getting through, by gosh, I'll die trying."

Six days later, Kay was killed during a solo training flight when her plane crashed not far from Avenger Field near Sweetwater. She was one of 38 WASPs to die during the war.

Her body was returned to Grand Forks, where she was buried in the Lawrence family plot in the Memorial Park Cemetery.



February 3, 1943

University Co-ed 'Pilot' Makes Her First Solo Flight

Kathryn Lawrence of Grand Forks, the only co-ed of 40 students enrolled in the University pilot training course, has made her first solo flight.

The students solo after a minimum of about eight hours dual instruction. Her instructor is Titus Richards.

Miss Lawrence also is the only girl of about 100 students taking the air course at various North Dakota schools. The training is offered through co-operation of the University and the civil aeronautics authority.

Editor's note: *At UND, the Kay Lawrence Women in Aviation Scholarship is given in honor of Kay Lawrence, the University's first woman pilot and an aviator who gave her life for her country in World War II.*

The photo at left of Kay Lawrence in UND Special Collections was donated by Marcy Gilbertson-Schoenecker.

Long lost scrapbooks return

Kay's letter to Marcy recently came to light when a copy of it was returned with two of her scrapbooks and other items to her nephew, 86-year-old Mike Lawrence of Grand Forks. He plans to one day donate Kay's scrapbooks, letters, and photos to UND's Department of Special Collections.

"I want to leave all this with the university after the family sees it," Mike said. "I think this is where it belongs."

Sometime after Kay's death, her mother, Chrissie Lawrence, gave Marcy a scrapbook Kay made during her high school years and another she compiled while attending UND. Marcy's son — Steve Schoenecker, now a retired doctor living in Corvallis, Mont. — found the scrapbooks among his mother's belongings after she died in February 2010.

Although the letter to Marcy is a poignant reminder of sacrifices Americans made during the war, content from the scrapbooks also provides a more personal look at the lives of Kay and Marcy, two young women who grew up best friends in Grand Forks. They entered UND as freshmen in 1938, both with the intention of earning their pilot's license through the Civil Aeronautics Authority flight training program, then offered through the College of Engineering & Mines.

"Even if Kay Lawrence wasn't UND's first female pilot, this material would be valuable," said Curt Hanson, head of Special Collections at UND's Chester Fritz Library. "It shows what her life was like at the time she was here at UND. Certainly, the fact she was one of the first WASPs gives it a women's military history application."

A pre-war snapshot in time

The aging covers of two scrapbooks from the late 1930s and early '40s can barely contain the tattered yellowed pages holding newspaper clippings grown brittle with time, keepsakes from long-ago events, and other mementos from Kay's life.

Text and photos within the more than 80-year-old scrapbooks tell the story of two intelligent, vibrant, energetic young women who dreamed of becoming aircraft pilots decades before the founding of UND's Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences. They graduated from Grand Forks Central High School together, enrolled at UND, and both signed up for pilot training.

They belonged to the same sorority, were both UND cheerleaders, and participated in the same athletic social, and academic activities.

“Kay strikes me as someone who wasn’t just going to sit around and do nothing,” Hanson said. “Whether it was cheerleading, basketball, softball, or becoming a pilot, she was not your shrinking violet. She had gusto.”

Mike said his Aunt Kay was probably influenced by her grandmother, Kathryn Harrison, who was a medical doctor in Seattle.

“I think that’s where Kay’s desire to fly came from,” Mike explained. “If her grandma could be a doctor, she could be a pilot. I believe that with all my heart because she’s named after her grandmother.

“Kay wanted to do something like my great-grandmother did.”

Two lives take different paths

Although Kay and Marcy’s lives diverged when Marcy left UND after her sophomore year to marry George Schoenecker, a professional baseball player from Minnesota who played for the Grand Forks Chiefs, they remained close and kept in touch. Marcy followed her husband’s baseball career to Kansas, where she started a family.

Even after Kay’s death, the Lawrence and Schoenecker families remained close. Steve recalled growing up hearing stories about his mother’s best friend.

“They must have been quite a force of nature, the two of them together,” he said. “I have no doubt Kay would have been a lifetime friend of my mom’s if she would have survived.”

Underscoring this point is a letter to Kay and Marcy from famous heavyweight boxer Jack Dempsey in response to a letter he’d received from them. They’d read comments from him disparaging women in athletics and they let him know they didn’t agree with his opinion.

“Thank you for your very intelligent and honest letter,” Dempsey wrote. “All I have to say is that I have the highest regard and respect for girl athletes, and women in general.

“In so much as you are intelligent,” he continued, “I do not think I need to say anymore except that I agree heartily with all your statements.”

Steve felt it was important to keep the scrapbooks, even though he didn’t know if any of Kay’s relatives were still alive.

“It just makes me feel so happy to know that these things were reconnected with the rightful people who should have them,” he said. “I knew Mike would really appreciate them.”

Google makes a connection

If not for a May 2021 article in UND Today on the UND’s Women in Aviation Chapter honoring Kay Lawrence on Memorial Day that year, the connection might not have been made. Steve related how a Google search provided a link to the article revealing that Kay had a living relative in Grand Forks.

Steve contacted UND about the memorabilia he possessed that once belonged to Kay, inquiring whether it would be possible to contact Mike Lawrence to return it to him. Within days after Mike and Steve visited by phone, the scrapbooks, photos, documents, and other items were on their way to Grand Forks.

“I’m so lucky this happened,” Mike said. “There’s so much stuff in here that I didn’t have a clue to some of the things that Kay did. It’s just going to be so much fun to look through this.”

Paging through one of the scrapbooks for the first time, Mike remarked, “It’s all the activities of a young lady going through college. Oh my gosh, it’s unbelievable how detailed this is.”

The number of aircraft photos in the scrapbook underscores Kay’s interest in aviation. Mike spotted a clipping showing a training aircraft flying above the UND campus and exclaimed, “Look at the aircraft! That’s what she would have been flying.”

Kay became the only woman among 40 students at UND to receive her pilot's license. Statewide, she was the only female of 100 students enrolled in the program at North Dakota colleges. It made her and Marcy the focus of media coverage, but it wasn't necessarily positive and tended to reflect the attitude of the time.

Steve noted that Marcy's scrapbook contains an October 1939 clipping from an unidentified newspaper questioning how she and Kay were selected for pilot training.

The reporter wrote, "I ran over to see the gals and offer my consolation, and what happened? I asked them how they got in, and Kay came out with — 'Oh, we took physical examinations.' Well, girls, evidently, there's nothing to it to hear them."

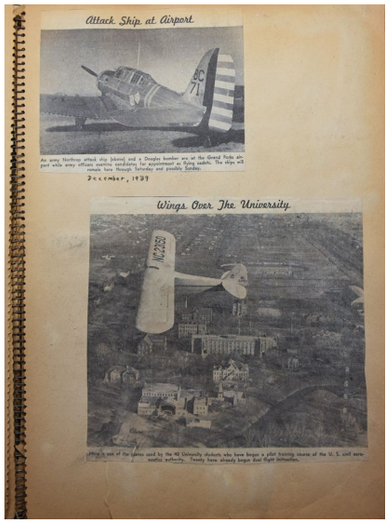
Under the clipping, Marcy penned a terse comment, "Some nerve!"

The winds of war

Kay attended UND from 1938 to 1942, graduating with a degree in education and her pilot's license. She worked for the Boeing Aircraft Co. in Seattle before being accepted for training in the WASP program.

Toward the back of Kay's scrapbook, there are blank pages and several loose newspaper clippings from August 1941, all related to the ongoing war in Europe and U.S. Army Air Corps pilot training.

It appears as though Kay suddenly had less time to keep the scrapbook current. In four months, the Japanese would launch their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, sending America into the war and forever changing the lives of two best friends, Kay and Marcy.



PART 2

Legacy of UND's first woman aviator inspires new generations of pilots

In Part 2 of this two-part feature story is a special Memorial Day item: a story featuring interviews with two winners of the Kay Lawrence scholarship and other female aviators, among them a UND graduate who's now an Air Force captain and pilot of the F-22 Raptor, a supersonic stealth fighter. Read the full article at blogs.UND.edu/UND-today.

FROM CLASSROOM TO CAREER

This spring, UND Aerospace launched its new Enhanced Air Traffic – Collegiate Training Initiative program, allowing graduates of the program to bypass the required attendance of the FAA Academy and instead enter directly into the workforce.

What has had to change with the implementation of the new program, and what was the process like?

"There was a ton of work to make sure we met all of the FAA objectives," said UND Associate Professor and Assistant Chair of Air Traffic Management Craig Carlson. "From the time the program was announced, it took us about 6 months to get approved. We have taken AVIT 464 Tower/Radar 3, which was a 4-credit class, expanded it to 6 credits, and took the radar portion out of it, so it is now just Tower 3."

As a student, why did you choose to attend UND for Air Traffic Management? What are you most excited about with the new enhanced program?

"I chose to go to UND not only for the respect the university has in the aviation industry but also because of the amazing opportunities they had for me," said Joslyn Sutton, an Air Traffic Management student. "Every day I'm here at UND, I know I made the best decision for my career. I'm most excited about how it's made this program grow, as our program size is going to grow a lot with the incoming class. Knowing that others see future success the same way I do makes me even more passionate about air traffic control. With skipping the academy comes a lot less job anxiety. Knowing that through my hard work and the support of my professors and peers, I can focus more on my skills and my assessment at the end of my senior year and less about the gamble that is an off-the-street bid."

The enhanced program changed the post-graduation path for many students. How do you see the enhanced program changing your original career plans?

"Originally, I had my five-year plans accommodating for a couple of months stay in Oklahoma City," said Air Traffic Management student Kathryn Barnes. "Now that has changed. It stressed me out a bit because I changed plans halfway through my college career. Much of it is double-checking my courses and ensuring I am on track to graduate within the program. I am excited to have a direct pathway to the workforce straight out of college, however! Getting into ATC was very quick for me, and I didn't understand the complexity or the depth of how to get from being a student or civilian to getting into the workforce. The instruction at UND greatly prepared me for the OKC FAA Academy, and now the enhanced program seeks to prepare me for a direct hire into a tower."

Did we see an increase in enrollment for Air Traffic Management? When do we expect to see the first students transition from UND under the enhanced program?

"We may have one student graduate this fall," said Carlson. "I would expect a few in the spring, but it will take about 4 years for the incoming freshmen who are coming here for the Enhanced program to graduate. The number of students expected for the fall is more than double what we saw last year. Overall, the program really provides more opportunities for our students. As an enhanced graduate, they will also have the opportunity to work at an FAA contract tower if they choose."

UND AEROSPACE SELECTS VIGILANT AEROSPACE FOR ADVANCED UAS EDUCATION, RESEARCH & TRAINING

The John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences has entered a one-year partnership with Vigilant Aerospace Systems to use the company's drone safety software and airspace management system FlightHorizon. A memorandum of understanding was signed late last year to formalize the agreement.

As part of the agreement, Vigilant Aerospace will provide training for UND Aerospace students and faculty, with full integration of FlightHorizon into the program's operations and research expected by summer. Further, the initiative aligns with UND Aerospace's commitment to advancing UAS traffic management and counter-autonomy and UAS (C-UAS) measures, areas increasingly relevant in light of recent drone sightings near critical infrastructure in New Jersey.

FlightHorizon uses NASA-patented technology to provide detect-and-avoid alerts during beyond visual line-of-sight (BVLOS) operations. By integrating multiple sensors, machine learning, and data sources, the software improves real-time situational awareness, allowing operators to proactively identify nearby aircraft and avoid potential collisions through visual and auditory alerts.

Impressively, the software also uses machine learning to accurately identify whether the nearby object is a bird or another aircraft such as a drone.

This collaboration comes as the FAA prepares to release new rules for BVLOS drone operations. It also shows UND Aerospace's commitment to working with industry leaders to safely operate and equip students with the skills to lead in the rapidly evolving UAS field, said Paul Snyder, director of UND's UAS program.

According to Snyder, the technology complements UND Aerospace's existing suite of C-UAS tools, including the 360-degree day/night cameras and radar systems made by the U.S.-based company DeTect Inc. The systems are already in use at Gorman Field.

"The software that Vigilant Aerospace provides can easily integrate with the hardware that we're using and will create a common operating picture that enables us to fuse hardware and data from DeTect radars and other sensors into one screen," Snyder said.

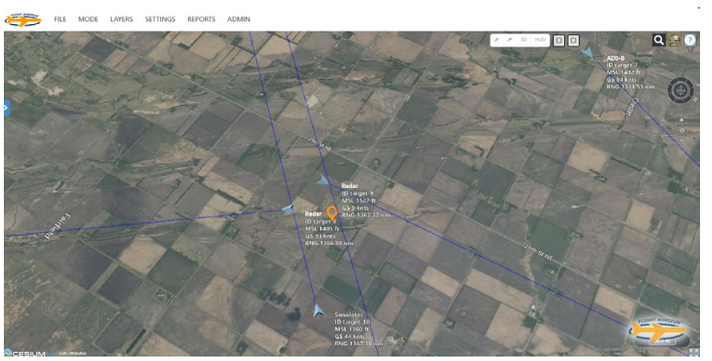
The agreement represents a step forward in the program's continued commitment to giving students access to cutting-edge technology and preparing them to be leaders in UAS fields, Snyder added.

"We're working with innovative, collaborative companies that want to move the UAS industry forward quickly, but safely," Snyder said. It remains essential to equip students and faculty with technology that provides a holistic understanding of UAS and counter-autonomous operations, he added.

Further, the growing interest in counter-autonomy/UAS measures piqued by recent sightings of mysterious drones in New Jersey makes this partnership timely, Snyder explained.

"The ability for this software to accurately identify cooperative and uncooperative traffic is important when we're thinking about national security, BVLOS, and flight safety in the National Airspace System," Snyder said. "Our students are getting a healthy amount of experience with not only BVLOS technology, but also technology for counter-UAS."

The agreement also includes a joint effort to submit FlightHorizon to the FAA's Near-Term Approval Process for Unmanned Aircraft System Traffic Management (UTM) services and pursue funding opportunities for C-UAS and UTM technologies.



"UND Aerospace educates some of the nation's most competitive aviation and UAS students and is one of the most accomplished and best-equipped research centers for autonomous aviation in the country," said Kraettli L. Epperson, CEO of Vigilant Aerospace. "We are excited to be entering into this new collaboration to support their operational and educational missions and advance the industry overall."

The agreement sets the stage for a mutually beneficial partnership, said Snyder, who added that he is optimistic about what UND and Vigilant Aerospace can accomplish together.

"Our hope is that we can grow together within this ever-changing field of UAS and autonomous technology," he said. "Vigilant Aerospace can continue to expand their product's capability, and we can continue to be on the cutting edge of education, training, and research."


DEFYING GRAVITY: A FLIGHT THROUGH TIME

Now, with a new aerobatic plane on the flight line, UND Professors Mike Lents and Joe Vacek tell of the team's history and what a new aircraft means for the future.

How did the aerobatic team get started? When was it? How many people were on the team originally?

VACEK: Tony Saurbrey and I hatched a plan to attend the Rice Lake Wisconsin IAC competition in the early summer of 2002. We flew there in a Seminole just to meet people and ended up volunteering all weekend, getting a good introduction and some bad sunburns. Over the next year, Tony, Ryan Carlson, and Greg Gilmer learned about the collegiate aerobatics program, and we started going to more competitions. Five years later, I returned to UND as an assistant professor of aviation and became the aerobatic team faculty advisor. That was around 2008, and at that time, Ryan Carlson and Greg Gilmer were the team coaches, and Mike Lents came up through the ranks as a student and then a coach. Mike then led the team on to great success over the next 10 years and continues to this day.

Has the aerobatic team always used Decathlons, and if not, when did we start using Decathlons? How many have we used it over the years?

LENTS: UND has operated Decathlons since the early 90s and has had some iconic aircraft. There was a time when UND had a Mudry Cap 10, a French aerobatic trainer, but that was before my time. The Decathlon has been the workhorse for spin and aerobatic training. The newest Super Decathlon is the fifth Super Decathlon I've flown since starting at UND in 2001.

How many people are on the aerobatic team? How can students get involved with aerobatics at UND?

LENTS: Many students are involved with our organization. At competitions, most competitors arrive with their own aircraft. We arrive sharing a single machine. While not entirely unusual, sharing an aircraft poses unique challenges and demands. The team is known for NASCAR-style pit stops shutting down, reconfiguring the aircraft, servicing, changing crews, and re-launching in short order to keep contests running smoothly. Students interested in aerobatics can sign up for the elective AVIT 389, and all students are welcome to join the Aerobatic Team student organization. Ready to fly or not, all are welcome to learn more about upset prevention and recovery training, aerodynamic spins, all-attitude flight, aerobatics, and safely maximizing aircraft performance!

What are some of the benefits of learning aerobatic flying?

LENTS: Learning aerobatics provides an opportunity to experience a greater level of freedom in flight safely. It promotes a greater feel for the energy state of the aircraft, smoothness on the controls, and the freedom to fly more aggressively in a machine built for it. Loss of control in flight, or LOC-I, has been a major issue and contributor to loss of life and machine in the aviation industry. Learning aerobatics is one part of the solution to the problem. Our program incorporates not only precision flying but also promotes good upset prevention and recovery techniques.

23
years
(est. 2002)

300
hours flown
annually

11
National
Championships

Who was the first person to fly the new Deca?

LENTS: I was fortunate to help coordinate the specifications and take delivery of N1923R at the factory. After acceptance, I put the first few hours on the aircraft and completed the engine break-in during flights to Grand Forks and Air Venture 2024 in Oshkosh, WI. Then, we debuted the aircraft with a performance I flew at the Williston Airshow. Upon return, the instructors were briefed on the avionics differences, and students started training shortly after.

What are some of the new features/abilities of the new Deca?

LENTS: There have been a number of updates to save weight and improve performance. The newest Decathlon features a redesigned aileron and a carbon fiber Hartzell Trailblazer propeller. This increases its roll rate at lower speeds, provides better climb performance, and improves its low-speed acceleration while decreasing weight and gyroscopic forces. One of the most notable changes for the pilot is the Garmin G3X panel, an advanced touch-screen primary flight display. The presentation is currently set to replicate a standard analog “six-pack” array of instruments, increasing situational awareness of acceleration and altitude, which are paramount to safe aerobatic operations. It also gives students experience with “conventional” instrumentation while still having all the advanced capabilities of the equipment they are accustomed to. All of these features combine to save significant weight on the airframe, which equates to more performance and greater operational flexibility.

What does a new aircraft mean for the team?

LENTS: When you see the new Decathlon, you know it’s from UND, and we’re here to compete. It’s increased our capability and flexibility during training and competition while maintaining the effectiveness in training that American Champion Aircraft Super Decathlons are known for. There are faster rolling and performing aircraft, but when it comes to training, Decathlons are predictable, docile, and demanding when it comes to perfection.

NEW FLIGHT OPERATIONS CENTER
CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

On May 28, 2025, city, county, and university leaders gathered to break ground on UND's new state-of-the-art flight operations center.

The $36 million facility will replace UND's current flight operations building – which was built in 1974 and is largely obsolete in today's academic environment. Funded entirely through private donations, the new building will feature 28,000 square feet of instructional and event-hosting space, including a dispatch center, pre- and post-flight debriefing rooms, and an aviation bookstore.

Construction began in June and will take about 18 months to complete.

In his welcoming remarks, UND President Andy Armacost alluded to Leonardo da Vinci — an Italian polymath of the Renaissance era best known for his artwork but whose contributions to the natural sciences also included observations on the potential for human flight.

Armacost read a quote often attributed to da Vinci but actually was spoken by an actor portraying the artist in a 1961 film. Nonetheless, Armacost said, it encapsulates da Vinci's interest in aviation.

"Once you have tasted flight, you will walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward," Armacost read. "For there, you have been, and there you will always long to return."

"For all those involved in the business of aviation and teaching people how to fly, I know that feeling of returning to flight lives within every pore of your souls and bodies," he continued. "This quote also represents the spirit of the Odegard School and UND Aerospace."

Robert Kraus, dean of the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences, expressed amazement at the progress the college has made since its establishment in 1968. From housing just a few aircraft at its inception to now calling over 15,000 professional pilots as alumni, Kraus said the new facility is evidence of nearly 60 years of momentum.

"When I arrived at UND a little over four years ago, one of the questions I asked is, 'What is the school's greatest need?'" he said. "The answer was a new flight operations building. The next generation of students who visit may be inspired to come through the gateway and start their UND journey."

And the new facility serves not only UND's aviation program but also as a beacon of the program's excellence, Kraus added.

"When people fly into Grand Forks International Airport, the first thing they will see is this flight operations building and our growing fleet of aircraft," he said. "The University's theme is Leaders in Action, and our students and graduates continue to exemplify that."

Kraus also thanked the many donors in attendance who made the project's construction possible — among them Seymour "Si" Robin, namesake of UND's Robin Hall. A lifelong aviator who has expressed admiration for the Odegard School's mission, Robin has pledged $5 million for the project and led the building's groundbreaking ceremony.

In addition to Robin and his family members in attendance, Kraus thanked other donors, including Chuck Ahearn, president of the James C. Ray Foundation. A Florida-based nonprofit dedicated to advancing opportunities in aviation education, the Foundation honors the aforementioned benefactor, who donated millions to the UND Aerospace Foundation in the course of his lifetime.

BECOME A PART OF OUR FUTURE

Your gift today will help build a Flight Operations Center worthy of our world-class program, giving future students the resources they need to soar.

Flight Training Society

Giving Levels

Level	Amount	Recognition
102 Society	$102 - $999	Name appears on digital signage
222 Society	$1,000 - $9,999	Single-engine plaque on donor wall*
325 Society	$10,000 - $24,999	Twin-engine plaque on donor wall*
480 Society	$25,000+	Jet plaque on donor wall*

* Former and current UND CFIs may include their CFI ‘ident’ on their name plate; include in the comment section when making your donation.

** Mockup of the donor wall. End result may vary.*

Learn more about the project and give today

Scan the qr code or visit **aero.UND.edu/flight-ops-center**

LEGISLATURE ESTABLISHES NORTH DAKOTA CENTER FOR AEROSPACE MEDICINE

Interprofessional center at UND will be product of large cross-campus initiative

The North Dakota Legislature has approved a bill to establish a new entity at UND: the North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine.

Gov. Kelly Armstrong signed the bill, House Bill 1612, on April 29. The bill directs the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences to establish the interprofessional center in collaboration with the UND School of Medicine & Health Sciences (SMHS), Student Health Services, University Counseling Center, and other campus partners.

The North Dakota Center for Aerospace Medicine's mandate will be to provide mental health support and Federal Aviation Administration medical certification assistance to pilots and aviation professionals across the state. The approved measure provides up to $250,000 in one-time funding to establish the center.

"With the governor's signing of House Bill 1612, North Dakota takes a bold step forward in shaping the future of aerospace medicine," said Marjorie Jenkins, dean of the UND SMHS. "This center represents a landmark collaboration between two of UND's most innovative programs. By uniting medicine and aerospace science, we're creating a national model for interdisciplinary research and education that will address the unique health challenges of flight and space exploration."

Robert Kraus, dean of Aerospace, heralded the collaborative nature of the center, and said its establishment keeps North Dakota at the forefront of aerospace and medical research and education.

"By offering mental health support and conducting cutting-edge research in aviation and space medicine, North Dakota continues to lead the way," said Kraus.

Elizabeth Bjerke, associate dean of Aerospace, and Jessica Doty, director of Student Health, were instrumental in laying the foundation of the Center for Aerospace Medicine, lawmakers and others say. In addition to conceptualizing the center and creating a statewide network of pilot support, both Bjerke and Doty traveled to Bismarck to testify before the Legislature in support of the bill — as did more than two dozen other people, including Jenkins and industry experts.

"Today, there is limited access to aerospace medicine specialists in North Dakota to assist pilots through stringent FAA requirements for medical certificates," said Doty in her testimony."This often creates a difficult and scary process to navigate when pilots are facing mental health challenges."

Bjerke echoed this sentiment, describing how the systematic barriers pilots face "lead to a dangerous culture of pilots not seeking the health care they need to thrive."

Tragedy befell UND in the fall of 2021 with the death of John Hauser. His death made it imperative that UND Aerospace officials work to bring about change in the aviation industry.

Since then, a number of initiatives have been enacted, including establishing the annual Aviation Mental Health Summit in December 2021 and directing $600,000 in investment funds to build an aerospace medicine network to increase access to care for students. The newly established Aerospace Medicine Center builds on those important steps.

The full text of the bill can be found online on the North Dakota Legislature's website.

AVIATION + MEDICINE = SURVIVAL

Box of medical supplies and equipment used for emergency medicine, including flexible splints, pressure/ACE wrap, a nasopharyngeal airway, and other critical items.

Despite stereotypes about the catastrophic nature of airplane accidents, the vast majority of pilots and passengers experiencing a fixed-wing airplane emergency do survive. At the same time, many survivors of accidents suffer an injury that requires immediate medical attention.

This reality prompted Drs. Jon Solberg and Justin Reisenauer—faculty of the UND School of Medicine & Health Sciences Department of Emergency Medicine and pilots themselves—to create an intensive first-aid workshop for student pilots of all types in partnership with Nick Wilson, associate professor in UND's Department of Aviation.

Interprofessional air incident seminar

"With the great skills both Dr. Solberg and Dr. Reisenauer brought to the table, we were able to provide students with some basic skills for survival post-accident and help them handle physical trauma in the short term," said Wilson, who doubles as faculty advisor for the college's Wilderness Pilots Association.

"It's a very important skill set for these aviation students to learn," said Wilson.

Reisenauer agreed, explaining that given aircraft design, the most common injuries that accident survivors are likely to see are severe bleeding, broken ribs, head and neck injuries, fractures, and lacerations.

"The goal [is] to help get students proficient at managing and mitigating the most common life-threatening injuries after an accident that they're not always taught during typical aviation training."

Student response

The workshop consisted of both SMHS medical students and aviation students. One of those students was fourth-year med student Bo Lauckner, who was on hand at the workshop to help teach aviation students.

"Emergency medicine is a lot of 'planning for the worst, hoping for the best,' and I think it's important for me to help teach people what to do should the worst happen," explained Lauckner, who is headed to St. Louis, Mo., in June to begin an emergency medicine residency. He was among the seven SMHS medical students helping train the 30 SAS aviation students who had registered for the workshop.

"I learned an abundance about wilderness survival, some of which I had never considered as a pilot before," said aviation management major Sadie Blace.

Commercial aviation major Ishir Agarwal likewise called the seminar "life-changing." "This experience could be the difference between life and death when confronted with an airplane accident," Agarwal said, "and the specialists who took the time to train us were unbelievable."

SURVEYING THE SNOW: A RESEARCH JOURNEY IN ICELAND

For eight months, UND Associate Professor Aaron Kennedy has braved the cold of the north. Not in North Dakota, but in the Westfjords region of Iceland in the town of Ísafjörður.

Kennedy's research on the observation of falling and blowing snow led him to the Icelandic Meteorological Office, the country's equivalent to the National Weather Service of the United States. He spent his year within their Avalanche and Landslide office, focused on the monitoring and forecasting of these weather hazards.

"Just like North Dakota, Iceland gets snow and blowing snow," said Kennedy. "Prior work has shown that these events influence the occurrence of avalanches in mountainous regions of Iceland."

Hoping to improve avalanche forecasting in the region, Kennedy set out to test his self-developed instrumentation. The opportunity allowed him to improve his device while also learning more about the prediction and prevention of hazardous weather.

"I wanted to see how custom instrumentation I have developed behaves in a different winter climate," explained Kennedy. "Located right on the North Atlantic, the environment is much wetter, and this produces different types of snow than what we typically have in North Dakota. Besides helping me build a better instrument, we wanted to see how the data could be used to monitor snow conditions leading up to avalanches. We also deployed other instruments I use in North Dakota to see if snow fences placed on top of a mountain were helping reduce the amount of blowing snow that would eventually accumulate in areas prone to create avalanches."

After big storms, Kennedy spent his time in Iceland doing fieldwork, checking instruments, and keeping them clean. The country's climate provided a new and unique environment for his work – one that had been recommended to him by a friend who suggested that it might be the perfect place to conduct his research.

"This really began as a conversation with a college friend of mine who is from Iceland," the professor explained. "She recognized my winter research might be useful for some of the problems they face, and given that I had already fallen in love with Iceland after a couple of bicycling trips, it seemed like a good match. After a few discussions and meetings, we put a project together, and I was incredibly fortunate to receive funding from the Fulbright program to carry out the project!"

The Fullbright U.S. Scholar program is an honor presented to select U.S. citizens to conduct professional projects throughout the globe. The program fosters international experiences, aiming to address worldwide challenges through collaboration with foreign institutions. Kennedy received the Fulbright Iceland-National Science Foundation Arctic Research Grant, allowing him to spend UND developmental leave dedicated towards his research in Iceland.

"One of the cool things about the Fulbright program is the natural activities that occur spontaneously," Kennedy explained. "I ended up teaching some lectures

Aurora Borealis and a full moon light up the sky above the towns of Ísafjörður and Hnífsdalur.

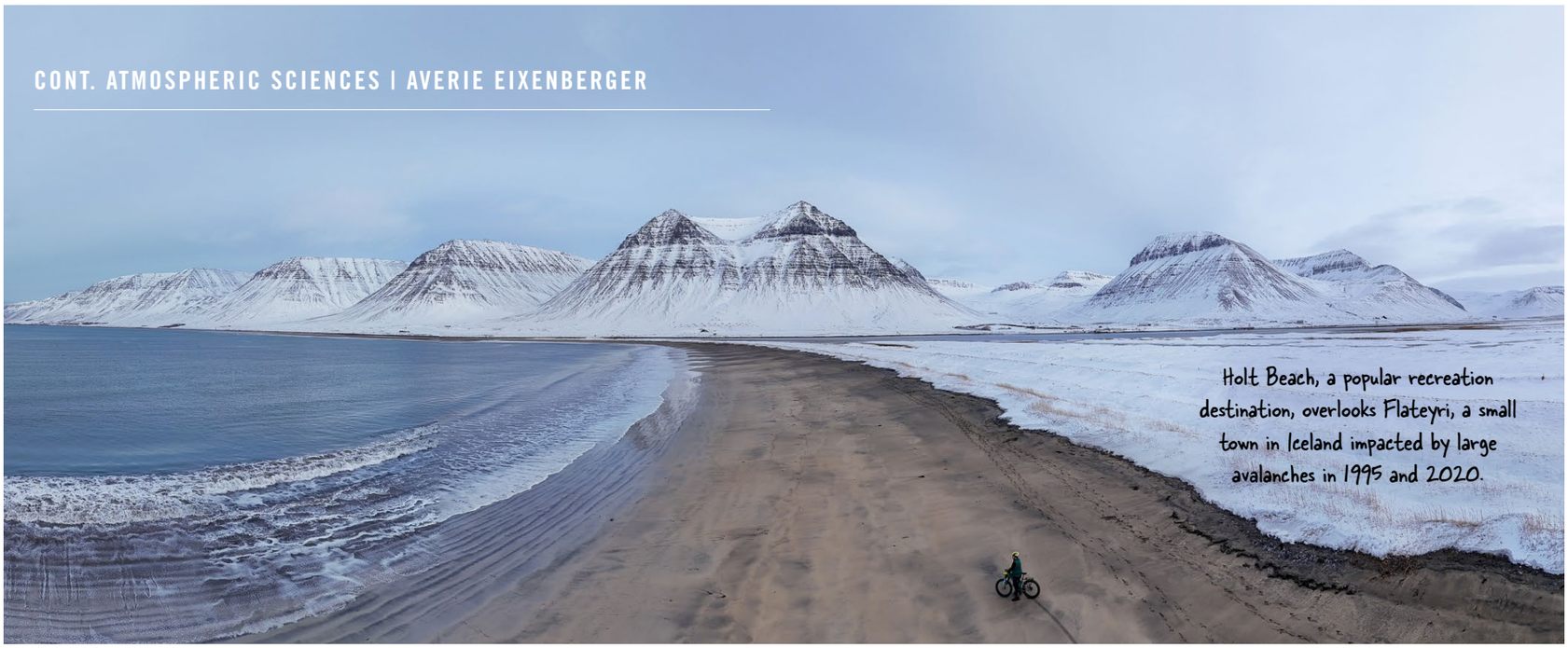
for an exchange program housed in the same building as our office, and I also offered support for a proposed project with the local university. While things went well while I was there, it was a pretty 'boring' winter for avalanches, so I left instruments behind for the upcoming winter. The goal is to go back this fall with a few upgrades for my custom instrumentation and then bring a few students with me to help out. Hopefully, this will spur even more collaboration!"

Outside of the research, Kennedy spent time enjoying all that Iceland had to offer. He remarked on how incredible it was meeting people, both in his research and in the community he found during his time there.

"It was amazing bringing my oldest daughter with me and having her experience all the wildness Iceland offers," he reminisced. "We literally landed and, within an hour, saw an erupting volcano. We saw the Northern Lights countless nights, spotted whales from our front window, experienced hurricane-force winds from downslope windstorms, and, oh yeah - my daughter was trapped in town for a night because a landslide buried the road between school and where we lived. Icelanders are extremely kind and resilient, and it was great working in a very community-first atmosphere."

Aaron Kennedy in Holt Beach, a popular recreation destination, overlooks Flateyri, a small town in Iceland impacted by large avalanches in 1995 and 2020.

Check out more photos from the trip! →



Holt Beach, a popular recreation destination, overlooks Flateyri, a small town in Iceland impacted by large avalanches in 1995 and 2020.

Professor Aaron Kennedy

In Iceland, field work and adventure often blend together where hiking, skiing, or even biking can be used to reach remote field sites.

Jóhannes Andrésson, an observation specialist at the Icelandic Meteorological Office, checks over blowing snow sensors installed on top of Eyrarfjall, the mountain overlooking Flateyri.

UND STORM CHASERS

The UND Storm Experience Class takes meteorology beyond the classroom and into the heart of severe weather. Led by Dr. Montana Etten-Bohm, assistant professor in the Atmospheric Sciences Department and supported by forecast assistants, this hands-on class teaches students how to forecast and safely observe weather phenomena in real-time. The 2025 UND Storm Chase Class embarked on an incredible **12-day journey across eight states, covering over 6,400 miles** in pursuit of extreme weather. On the first day alone, students witnessed a tornado, overshooting tops, Mammatus clouds, gravity waves, a horseshoe vortex cloud, and Kelvin-Helmholtz waves—a truly rare and thrilling experience. From making forecasts in hotel rooms to delivering on-the-road weather briefings, students experience the raw power of nature while applying classroom knowledge in the field. **As the largest storm-chasing class in UND history**, it delivered an unforgettable experience and a deep dive into atmospheric sciences.

BEYOND AEROSPACE: LEADING THE NEXT FRONTIER

Jonathan Blankenship, a rising Junior at the University of North Dakota, in addition to his majors in Commercial Aviation and Unmanned Aircraft Systems, is dedicated to making a difference in his community. Between representing North Dakota at the Henry Clay Center's College Student Congress and being elected for student body president, Blankenship aspires to advocate for students, both in UND Aerospace and on the broader UND campus.

Henry Clay Center's College Student Congress

This May, Blankenship served as the representative from North Dakota at the 2025 College Student Congress. This two-week program includes fifty-one undergraduate students representing each state and Washington.

"It was a really special opportunity to get to meet individuals from each state," expressed Blankenship. "You don't get that very often, where you can get one student from each state in the country in a room together, so I really made an effort to try and connect with everyone. It was a pretty unique experience."

Students in the program spend one week at the University of Kentucky developing a bipartisan solution to an issue facing the United States. Assigned to one of four topics, students must work together to research the different sides of the issue and ultimately come to a compromise.

"I was put into the trade and tariff policy group, where we had to establish the two sides to the issue," told Blankenship. "The idea is that you split your group between the two sides and argue your assigned side, whether you believed in it or not, to gain perspective and knowledge on the policy and how it affects the country."

Blankenship was put into a group of 12 students who worked to create a solution that included imposing tariffs on only specific products, such as finished products, and working on specific agreements with various countries. They also proposed giving some power of creating tariffs to Congress and wanted to establish a "Made in America Fund," where 50% of tax revenue would go into the fund to help domestic companies and pull jobs back into the US.

"That was the big takeaway from all of this," he said. "To have bipartisan

agreements where we move forward and solve key issues we face as a country."

Making Connections

The students then had the opportunity to spend a week in Washington, touring various sites throughout the Capital. Throughout the trip, the students had the opportunity to mingle and get to know each other as they worked on their projects.

"Ironically, everyone was either pre-law, political science, philosophy, or something to do with politics," explained Blankenship. "I was the only one with something different—being aviation. I enjoyed talking to people about this topic and telling them about UND Aerospace and the top flight program that we have. It was fun showing that I have an interest in politics and also want to pursue a career in aviation. Everyone wanted to hear about it, and it was one of the first times I got to talk about aviation with people who don't really know anything about it."

One of Blankenship's key goals in the program was to connect with each of the students there. He explained how each of the people he met had interesting backgrounds and how he made some good friends among them.

"One of my goals in life is to try and connect with as many people as possible," Blankenship said. "Everyone was from a different school, a different state, and I got to connect with most of them. At the end of the two weeks, we attended a big awards ceremony, and the award I received was 'Most Likely to Become President of the United States'. It was really neat to not only connect with those people but to also be recognized by them as someone who could potentially go on to serve in a federal office. It shows how connecting with people can make a difference, and at the end of the day, I met some great friends that I will hopefully keep in touch with."

Student Body President

Recently, Blankenship was elected as the 2025-2026 student body president at UND. His "Voice for All" platform stands for vision, opportunity, involvement, community, and empower.

Blankenship holds a vision of a safer campus, featuring a new SafeRides program for students that provides late-night shuttle services to help students get home safely. He wants to provide more opportunities for students and organizations on campus and hopes to involve the administration more in student life. Finally, he wants to promote community by connecting various existing groups together on campus and empowering students through increased communication.

"I love the word empower," Blankenship stated. "The way we empower our students is through transparency and communication. If we aren't transparent with our student body, how can they know what we are doing is right or what they want our campus to be? The actions and decisions we make should be based on the voices of the students. We want to improve communication so that students know the decisions we are making on their behalf are what they want."

Blankenship explained that he felt a pull towards community service and leadership from a young age, working in a buddy system in elementary school that helped young students get to and from the school building and their rides. Throughout middle school and high school, Blankenship served as student body president and wanted to continue public service during his time at UND.

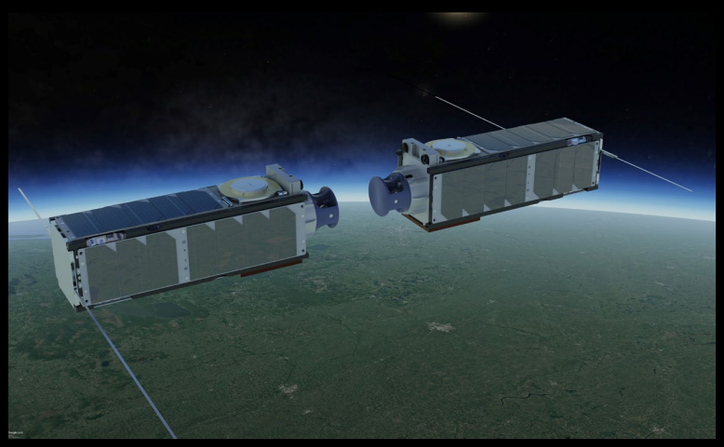
"When I came to UND, I felt a sense of disconnection from aerospace to the rest of campus, and I didn't want Aerospace to be isolated, so I ran for aerospace senator," he stated. "While I didn't win, I was offered a secretary position in student government, so I was still able to make my voice known. I knew I wanted to do that at the highest level possible, so I ran for student body president. I enjoy all aspects of UND, and I think it has so much more to offer. We have some great communities, and as a whole, we are so much stronger together. So not just connecting Aerospace, but connecting everyone, will be the best way to lead."

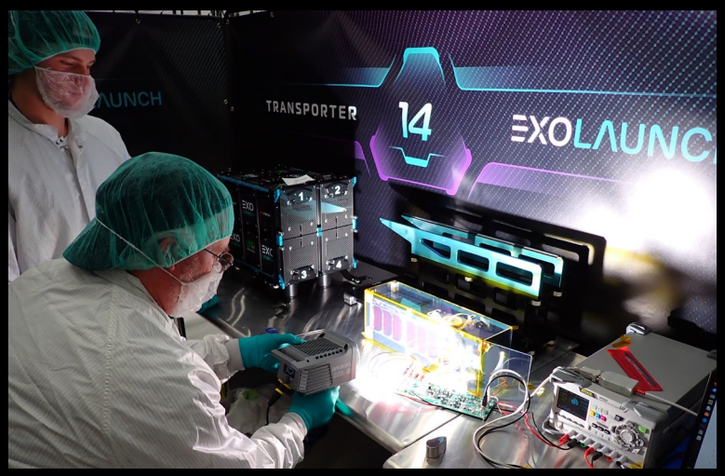
What's Next

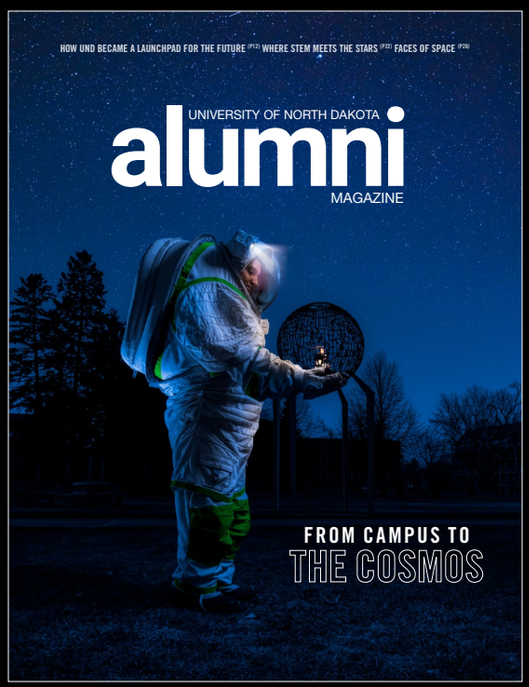
Blankenship explained that he has many paths that he could follow in the future. As a double major in aviation, he is still deciding which of those paths he wants to pursue during his career and how he wants to incorporate his interests in politics into them.

"Running for president in 2040," he joked when asked about his plans for the future. "It's so hard because of pursuing two paths of commercial aviation and UAS, and I'm interested in both. I'm currently leaning toward the commercial aviation path just because I enjoy traveling and meeting new people. But I'm also interested in politics. Maybe local office to start, but I'll have to see where it takes me."

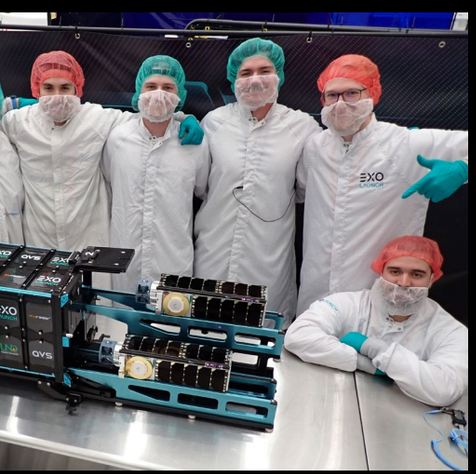
UND LAUNCHED THE FIRST-EVER SATELLITES COMMISSIONED IN NORTH DAKOTA



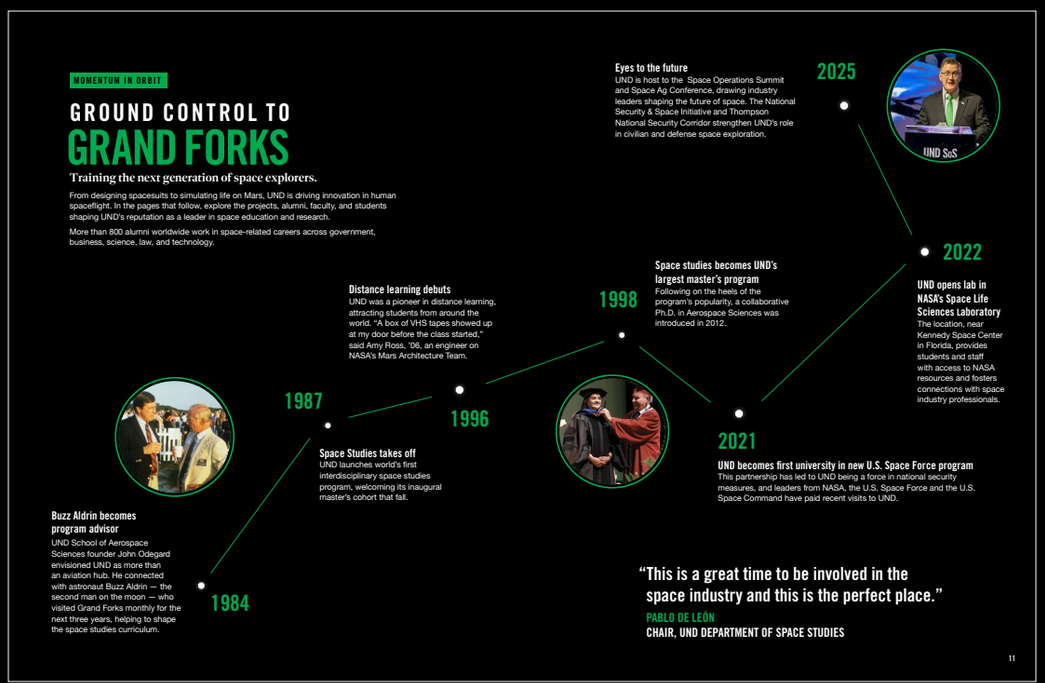




The pair of satellites, part of UND's Rendezvous & Operations for Autonomous Docking and Servicing (ROADS) mission, were developed in collaboration with AVS USA, an engineering firm headquartered in upstate New York. The two satellites, which will be controlled and operated from the top of UND's Odegard Hall, are low Earth orbit satellites - denoting an altitude of 1,200 miles above Earth or less.



Congratulations to one of our Spring 2025 Fellows, Malissa Reinhardt, on her research, and our Director, Dr. Caitlin Milera, on her teaching! Check out this University of North Dakota | UND Aerospace video highlighting the importance of storytelling in space exploration.



MOMENTUM IN ORBIT

GROUND CONTROL TO GRAND FORKS

Training the next generation of space explorers.

From designing spacesuits to simulating life on Mars, UND is driving innovation in human spaceflight. In the pages that follow, explore the projects, alumni, faculty, and students shaping UND's reputation as a leader in space education and research.

More than 800 alumni worldwide work in space-related careers across government, business, science, law, and technology.

1984
Buzz Aldrin becomes program advisor
UND School of Aerospace Sciences founder John Odegard envisioned UND as more than an aviation hub. He connected with astronaut Buzz Aldrin — the second man on the moon — who visited Grand Forks monthly for the next three years, helping to shape the space studies curriculum.

1987
Space Studies takes off
UND launches world's first interdisciplinary space studies program, welcoming its inaugural master's cohort that fall.

1996
Distance learning debuts
UND was a pioneer in distance learning, attracting students from around the world. "A box of VHS tapes showed up at my door before the class started," said Amy Ross, '06, an engineer on NASA's Mars Architecture Team.

1998
Space studies becomes UND's largest master's program
Following on the heels of the program's popularity, a collaborative Ph.D. in Aerospace Sciences was introduced in 2012.

2021
UND becomes first university in new U.S. Space Force program
This partnership has led to UND being a force in national security measures, and leaders from NASA, the U.S. Space Force and the U.S. Space Command have paid recent visits to UND.

2022
UND opens lab in NASA's Space Life Sciences Laboratory
The location, near Kennedy Space Center in Florida, provides students and staff with access to NASA resources and fosters connections with space industry professionals.

2025
Eyes to the future
UND is host to the Space Operations Summit and Space Ag Conference, drawing industry leaders shaping the future of space. The National Security & Space Initiative and Thompson National Security Corridor strengthen UND's role in civilian and defense space exploration.

"This is a great time to be involved in the space industry and this is the perfect place."
PABLO DE LEÓN
CHAIR, UND DEPARTMENT OF SPACE STUDIES

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CHECK OUT THE FULL MAGAZINE

issuu.com/undalumniassociation

HIGHLIGHTS

UND TODAY

SPACE FORCE GENERAL, SPACE LEADER TOUR 'MIRACLE HOUSE'

APRIL 24, 2025

In tandem with U.S. Sen. Kevin Cramer, Space Force Gen. Michael Guetlein and Space Development Agency Director Derek Tournear praise UND's capabilities

A pair of senior space leaders and one of North Dakota's U.S. senators visited UND on April 21, making introductions, learning about research capabilities, and discussing an upcoming agreement that will provide many opportunities for both the federal government and the University.

UND TO PARTNER WITH AIR AND ARMY NATIONAL GUARD FOR JOINT COUNTER UAS EXERCISES MAY 20, 2025

Collaboration will boost Armed Forces' capabilities, fuel innovation and workforce development, say UND Aerospace leaders

The North Dakota Air and Army National Guard have signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of North Dakota to collaborate on Counter Uncrewed Aerial Systems and Advanced Air Mobility initiatives.

Read full stories at UND Today
blog.UND.edu

YouTube

Ever wonder what it's REALLY like to train as an Air Traffic Controller?
Get an inside look with a Day in the Life of a University of North Dakota Air Traffic Control student! Tyler Nordberg, a sophomore in Air Traffic Management at the University of North Dakota, takes you through his busy day! From morning workouts and meteorology class to hands-on simulator training and club meetings, see what a typical day entails. **@UofNorthDakota**

AWARD WINNING SHORT FILMS

The Aviatrix

The Untold Story of Florence Klingensmith

The Aviatrix shares the daring story of Florence Klingensmith, known as "Tree Tops," who defied gender norms in early aviation. Spurred by a snub from Charles Lindbergh, she became a record-breaking pilot, mastering daring stunts and aerobatics. But her meteoric rise was cut short by tragedy, exposing the sexism of the era. Now, her inspirational story soars again, reminding us how one woman's courage can blaze a trail for future generations.

2x Upper Midwest Emmy Award Nominee

Carl Ben Eielson: Over the Top of the World

Triumph and Tragedy of an Aviation Legend

Soaring over unforgiving Arctic expanses, Carl Ben Eielson defied death to etch his name among the most daring aviators ever known. From meager roots in North Dakota, Eielson developed an insatiable thirst for conquering the skies. With frozen fortitude, Eielson achieved the unthinkable—the first aerial crossing of the North Pole. But the lure of heroics proved fateful. During a 1930 rescue mission in remote Siberia, fortune abandoned him. The story follows Eielson's rise from obscurity to legend, culminating with his ill-fated final flight.

2x Upper Midwest Emmy Award Winner

Flying Around Hurricane Helene

An unpredictable ferry flight

After picking up three new Archers at the Piper Aircraft Facility in Vero Beach, FL, three lead flight instructors at UND Aerospace ventured back to Grand Forks, ND, just days before Hurricane Helene made landfall. The ferry flight became a true test of skill and endurance, demonstrating the exceptional training and professionalism of UND pilots as they navigated away from the storm's unpredictable challenges. Watch as they recount the challenges, strategies, and teamwork that kept them safe through the storm.

Cleared for Takeoff

Overcoming the Mental Health Stigma in Aviation

Cleared for Takeoff explores the hidden mental health struggles pilots face and the intense fear of losing their FAA medical certification if they seek help. Through one student's journey, the film reveals how stigma and regulatory barriers keep many aviators silent—and what it takes to break through.

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF TELEVISION ARTS & SCIENCES
UPPER MIDWEST CHAPTER

YouTube
@UNDaerospace

AEROSPACE CONNECTIONS

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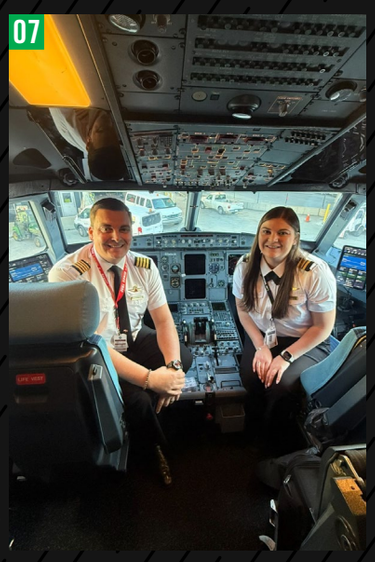

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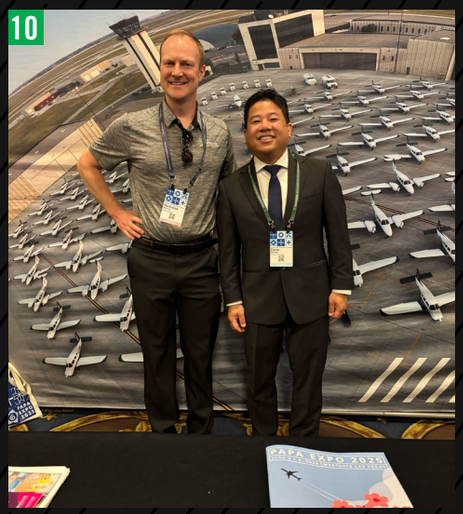

1.At the United Captain Upgrade Wings Ceremony, Captain **Sheldon Martin '17** presented **Jake Spellacy '20** with his wings.

2. First officers at Endeavor Airlines, **Sophia Jensen '22** and **Vander Dean '22**, in Memphis at a hotel on an overnight trip.

3. Pictured in the cockpit of a Boeing 787 Dreamliner, American Airlines Captain **Tom Walman '83** and First Officer **Rob Pottinger '95** flew together from Paris to Philadelphia.

4. **Scott Waldman '21**, first officer at Mesa Airlines, happened to run into his best friend from UND, **Yousef Almatrok '21**, first officer at SkyWest Airlines, while between flights at the MSP airport.

5. In Battle Creek, Michigan, **Douglas Gurel '95** and **Paul Schuler '05** were assigned together for a NetJets maintenance flight.

6. Delta Air Lines Captain **Rob Geisler '86** and his nephew **Brad Geisler '13** are pictured on the MSP airport ramp. From a family of UND pilots, Brad's father graduated from UND in 1981 and is a retired 757/767 captain for Northwest and Delta Air Lines. His grandfather is a 1961 graduate and retired from Northwest Airlines as a 747 captain and the chief of flight Test.

7. Captain **James Vejr '15** and First Officer **Morgan Vejr '15** flew together as husband and wife for the first time at Delta Air Lines from Minneapolis to Mexico City. .

8. Endeavor Air First Officer **Jordon Gyapong '23** ran into **Jared Herndon '08**, a First Officer at Delta Air Lines in the JFK Terminal.

9. UND AtSc alums gathered at the wedding of **Devin Bissell '20** and **David Singewald '22** in Colorado on August 3, 2024. Top row: **Dillon Vogt '22**, **Cassidy Holth '22**, **Aaron Scott '17**, **Michael Willette '23**, and **Andrew Kramer '24**. Middle row: Gretchen Mullendore, former faculty, **Nick Gapp '16**, **Matt Tuftedahl '19**, **Evan Rys '21**, and **Caitlin Connell '21**. Front row: **Alec Sczepanski '21**, Wanda Seyler, AtSc Administrative Secretary, **Devin Bissell '20** grad, and **David Singewald '22** grad.

10. Associate Professor of Aviation **Nicholas Wilson '06** and **Dane Sasaki '07**, who previously worked together at Northwest/Delta Air Lines, reconnected at the PAPA Expo.

11. **Nathan Wurst '22** reconnected with Line Check Airman **Alex Latham '20** during Nathan's IOE as a brand new First Officer at SkyWest on the CRJ550. Alex was Nathan's MEI during 325 flight training at UND in the Piper Seminole - 3.5 years later, they flew together again, this time in a jet.

12. American Airlines Captain **Ben Bays '08** and First Officer **Kris Drager '06** flew together from Charlotte to San Diego.

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