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# Civil Air Patrol

U.S. Air Force Auxiliary



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# 100th Cadet Earns Private Pilot Certificate Through Cadet Wings

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Civil Air Patrol is marking a major milestone after Cadet Chief Master Sgt. Andrew Wilson of the Texas Wing's David Lee (Tex) Hill Composite Squadron became the 100th cadet to earn his private pilot certificate through CAP's Cadet Wings program.

Wilson, 18, received his certificate following a check ride with a

Federal Aviation Administration examiner on the Fourth of July at San Marcos Regional Airport, just days before reporting to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.



"It was a good day," Wilson said.

"I'm excited to

have it done, and for what comes next."



He hopes to eventually become a military aviator. "That's my goal right now," he said. "I'm leaning toward flying jets."

Funded by the U.S. Air Force to offset the nation's looming pilot shortage, the 2½-year-old merit-based Cadet Wings program is the opportunity of a lifetime for cadets like Wilson, who have earned their wings despite the challenges of ground school and flight training and, over the past 18 months, the many restrictions wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We commend Cadet Wilson on his achievement, service to his community, and to our nation," said Lt. Gen. Kirk Pierce, commander, Headquarters, 1st Air Force (Air Forces Northern).

"CAP is a Total Force partner, and the U.S. Air Force needs people like Cadet Wilson to do its mission."

CAP's national commander and CEO also weighed in.

"My heartfelt congratulations to Cadet Wilson, our 100th Cadet Wings program graduate," said Maj. Gen. Mark Smith. "He has accomplished a wonderful personal goal; more so, he marks an important milestone in a critically important program that Civil Air Patrol has, thanks to the Air Force's investment."

Smith said he is pleased the Air Force had the foresight to invest in CAP's youngest members through the Youth Aviation Initiative, beginning in January 2019. Over the past three fiscal years, the Air Force has contributed \$7.2 million toward these programs. About \$1.8 million of that has been used to fund Cadet Wings.

"Their investment is paying dividends in a wide range of initiatives that help inspire youth toward STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields and aviation," he said.

"The centerpiece of the initiative, of course, is the Cadet Wings program. Providing funding to help our cadets earn their private pilot certificates is a dream come true for our youth. It helps to launch them toward career goals they could previously only dream about."

Air Force Col. Mark Wootan is commander of CAP-USAF, the Air Force unit based at CAP National Headquarters that helped secure annual funding for the Youth Aviation Initiative and tracks those flying programs' progress for the Air Force. "This program is indeed a difference-maker," Wootan said. "These cadets are our future leaders, and this achievement is a testament to their talents and determination to succeed, as earning this certificate is not an easy task."

Wootan said the relationship between the Department of the Air Force and Civil Air Patrol, the Air Force auxiliary, made Cadet Wings a reality. "I am grateful for the chief of staff of the Air Force, the secretary of the Air Force/Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Air Combat Command and 1st Air Force leadership teams that supported CAP-USAF and CAP efforts to bring this program to life and sustain it," he said.



The Cadet Wings program provides the money for formal flight training for cadets pursuing a private pilot certificate, considered by the aviation community to be the first step for those who want a flying career. This is achieved in one of four ways — with a local CAP aircraft and instructor, at a local FBO (fixed base operator), or via one of two in-residence options, at little or no cost to the cadet.

"We are able to remove the financial barrier and allow cadets to focus on flying," said Margarita Mesones, cadet aviation career activities manager at National Headquarters.

That opportunity allowed Wilson, who started his flight training by renting an aircraft to fly with a Civil Air Patrol flight instructor, to finish it through a small FBO at the San Marcos airport, where his squadron is based.

Wilson said he joined CAP because he wanted to one day go to a service academy. "I fell in love with CAP and the opportunities it offered," he said.

His story is similar to that of other cadets in the Cadet Wings



program. Several, like Wilson, have received their certificates through the program and are pursuing military careers this summer.

One of those is Cadet 2nd Lt. Sarah Skjeveland of the Minnesota Wing's Mankato Composite Squadron, who became the 51st Wings graduate in August 2020 while much of the country was recovering from the COVID-19 shutdown.



"The pandemic drastically changed everyone's life and seemingly halted everyone's activities," she said, "However, I was fortunately allowed to continue my flight training through the Cadet Wings program with proper COVID precautions. Getting to fly through this program offered me a lot of

joy in a time when joy seemed sparse. It is a program that I would recommend to anyone interested in aviation."

Skjeveland is in Colorado Springs now, undergoing basic training for entry into the U.S. Air Force Academy. Though a career as an Air Force cardiologist is her main goal, she plans to put her private pilot certificate to use as well. "I love to fly very much and will also apply for a pilot slot from the academy," she said.

"I have always had a love for the F-16," Skjeveland added. "It is never a bad idea to keep the doors of opportunity open!"

One of the program's hallmarks is its efforts to bring more young women and minorities into aviation. According to the FAA's most recent year-end data, 5.72% of the nation's certificated pilots are women. Of the 100 cadets who have achieved their private pilot certificate through Cadet Wings so far, 25 – 25% --are female. And 19 cadets, or 19%, of the cadets graduating from the program identify as Asian, Black or Hispanic. Those numbers are also above the norm for the industry.

Maj. Cathy Plasschaert of the Mankato squadron, Skjeveland's flight instructor, is an advocate for the Wings program and its push for diversity and inclusion.

"As a former cadet and now airline captain, I hope all young cadets realize that they also can achieve their goals of flying for a major airline one day if they work hard," said Plasschaert, whose daughters, Taylor and Tabitha, were the fourth and 57th cadets to earn their private pilot certificates through Cadet Wings. "If I can do it, they can too. Cadet Wings is one avenue to help them achieve that goal."

Plasschaert said Skjeveland, like Wilson, is already a role model for other CAP cadets. “Sarah worked hard to obtain her goal of attending the Air Force Academy and never gave up when she was met with obstacles,” Plasschaert said. “We are proud of her accomplishments thus far and are excited to see where her future takes her as she commits to service to our country.”

All 100 cadets who have attained their private pilot certificates are [listed here](#).

## MISSION STATEMENT

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**Supporting America’s communities with emergency response, diverse aviation and ground services, youth development, and promotion of air, space and cyber power.**

## CONTACT

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