
HOW DO I “WOW” THEE: MEMBERSHIP RECOGNITION

JUDY REDLAWSK: OUTSTANDING AVIATRIX

BY: SCOTT SIMPSON, FC, FSO-PA 24-04



In celebration of International Women’s Day, I was tasked to feature a female aviator in our flotilla Aux Air 24-04. It’s not every day that you get to interview a woman like Judy Redlawsk and that interview left me thinking “WOW.”

Judy Redlawsk is a woman of many hats and many talents, but her passion is flying. At the tender age of five, Judy learned to tell time by watching the airplanes over her house in Chicago as they came and went from Midway airport. “Every night I sat on the back stoop and watched the flights come in.”

It was her uncle who gave her her first ride in an airplane when she was 10. He was in the Army Air Corps, the precursor to the

U.S. Air Force, and he paid for the ride to chase buffalo down the river. It was then that Judy thought, “My gosh, I can do this. I’m going to be a pilot!”



Air Station, Atlantic City, NJ. Judy Redlawsk completes paperwork next to her Robinson R44 helicopter with a CG M65 Dolphin helicopter in the background. (Photo by Ron Kripas, Air Crew)

Her mother, Beth, encouraged this passion and agreed to sign the permission slip needed for Judy to start flying classes when she turned 14. Within just a few years, she flew solo, earned her private pilot license, and went to college in Oklahoma where she earned her commercial pilot license. But what would come next for a woman in the 1950s who wanted to work in the airline industry?

“Initially, I didn’t think I could make a living as a pilot because the opportunities for women just weren’t there at the time.” Judy joined the American Flyers as a flight attendant, but she never gave up on her passion for becoming a pilot. “I would go up and help to make position reports for the pilots, talk to the stations, and pick the

brains of the smart people who flew these aircraft.”

When American Flyers merged with a larger company, Judy was laid off and started working for Xerox. “I took a cab to the interview, and they asked whether I had a driver’s license, because I was going to have to drive around to maintain accounts. I told them no, but I will by Monday. So, I went out and got my driver’s license over the weekend and bought a car.”

During this time, she maintained her passion for flying by working part time as a flight instructor. Out of the blue, an old contact called to tell her they were setting up a new travel club and asked if Judy would write the manual and train their flight attendants. “I told him sure, so long as I can go out with the pilots on their training.” At these trainings, Judy read all of the manuals and learned everything she could about the aircraft. At the ground school, she answered so many questions that the instructor had to remind her to give the pilots a chance to answer.

Finally, she got a chance to fly the airplane, but none of the men thought she was strong enough to handle the aircraft. Judy didn’t think she had the strength either, but she had studied the airplane enough that she figured out a way to fly it without hydraulics and landed right on the line. “How did you know that would work?” Someone asked. “I didn’t,” Judy admitted. “But I studied it all and knew that there were two other people in the cockpit to help keep us safe.”

That’s when the owner said, “If you don’t hire her, then we will!” For the next few years, she flew a DC8 around the world with the travel club as the co-pilot.

One day when the DC8 was in maintenance, she was talking to some friends whose plane was also in maintenance and ready for a check ride, but they needed a second pilot. She’d never

flown it before, but she sat in the cockpit for an hour to learn all the switches and was ready to fly.

When the travel club went belly up, her help flying that check ride landed her a job with Harsco, where she’s been ever since 1975, first as co-pilot, then as pilot, and now as chief pilot.

Judy is extremely safety conscious, and she has a few simple rules for those she works with. First, if you screw up, fess up. “The quickest way out my door is to make a mistake and not open up and share it. When we share it, we all learn and can do it again right. Second, everyone comes to work with trash in their basket, so look for ways to help empty other people’s baskets. “If I’m not feeling up to flying, then I have someone to take my place. It’s just not worth it to take the chance.”



*Airborne, USA. Judy Redlawsk, doing what she loves best!
(Photo by Ron Kripas, Air Crew)*

Coast Guard Auxiliary

Back in the 90s, Judy and a friend decided they’d go out on sailing, and she fell in love with the water. She quickly dove into this new passion, earning her charter license and being qualified to handle everything

from a 28-foot to a 56-foot sailing boat. It was while she was working on her Captain's License when she first learned about the Coast Guard Auxiliary, who happened to be teaching the course.

Just like all of her passions, Judy jumped in with both feet and soon she was a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. "Everyone should give back to their country in one form or another." She started teaching Public Education and Boating Safety classes. Shortly after, she was doing Marine Dealer Visits and Vessel Exams. Then someone asked, "You're a pilot? Have you heard about the AUXAIR program?" Her Robinson R-44 helicopter was soon a facility and Judy wound up on the National Staff for Aviation Training. She flies about 120 hours a year for the Coast Guard Auxiliary, in addition to teaching AUX 14, 15, 17, 18, and flying for Harsco.

having soloed over 50 years ago and having a clean record with the FAA. She's only ever had one accident, a mechanical issue, which led to her landing her helicopter in someone's backyard.

The advice she has for a young woman interested in flying today is simple, "Don't be afraid to work hard and learn from other people. We're not in this alone and everyone needs a mentor."

After over thirty years of service in the Coast Guard Auxiliary and fifty years of flight, Judy still feels privileged and honored to do what she does.



Air Station, Atlantic City, NJ. Judy Redlawsk (left) gets ready for take-off for a Maritime Observation Mission over the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays. To her left is Patti Kuhn, Air Crew (Photo by Ron Kripas, Air Crew)

She has over 34,000 lifetime flight hours since earning her wings at 16. The most hours she ever flew in one year was 1,200, the least was during the first year of COVID, just 300. She is a future recipient of the Wright Brothers award for

