

# Dream Big!

## Women Soar—You Soar

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**D**ream Big! was the mantra of EAA's annual Women Soar program at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2007. The program, which ran for two event-filled days, brought together 130 high school girls with more than 30 mentors and other volunteers to share the excitement of aviation, science, and technology.

On day one, pre-AirVenture Sunday, the girls participated in several outdoor challenge course activities, from working with a partner to untangle a rope to raising a large plastic ring as a group, fingertips only. Besides the ice-breaking benefits, the activities served to build decision-making, teamwork, creativity, trust, conflict resolution, and a slew of other skills. "I heard some girls say they couldn't do this or that, but most of them were very supportive and told them they could," said mentor Kara Swensen, founder and CEO of Alaris Aviation.



Refreshed and relaxed from the afternoon's activities, the girls, mentors, and volunteers gathered under a large white tent near the Nature Center for dinner, inspiration, and the scholarship ceremony. Speaker Chanda Budhabhatti, a longtime aviation advocate and holder of several speed records, talked about the importance of holding onto one's dream. While growing up in India, Chanda described how her mother did not want the teenager to be a pilot. In protest, Chanda went on a hunger strike. By the third day, her mother relented, stating that she'd rather see her daughter die doing something she enjoyed rather than dying of starvation in her room.

Several scholarships were given, including the Ethel Finley Scholarship awarded by the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), the Cdr. John Paradiso Scholarship offered by the distinguished World War II naval aviator's daughters and EAAers Johnnie Paradiso and Nina Clay Paradiso, and the Ragged Edge Scholarship created by EAA Lifetime

members and mentors Lt. Col. Jill Long and Crissy Tonsi. The first two scholarships are for either the EAA Air Academy or EAA AeroScholars program. The last one is for travel and attendance to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center (Space Camp) in Huntsville, Alabama.

Next, the large group headed to the Eagle Hangar in the EAA AirVenture Museum to hear civilian space traveler Anousheh Ansari speak about realizing her dream to see the Earth from space. Her presentation, titled "To Dare, To

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The presentation made a large impression on 14-year-old Sabrina Gonzales Pasterski of Chicago. "She (Anousheh) understands that risks must be taken to achieve great things, not to mention that her X Prize single-handedly created private space travel and the resulting industry—or at the very least caused it to fast-forward about 20 years." Sabrina, who skipped ninth grade last year and is a member of EAA Chapter 153, recently finished building (yes, building) a Zenith CH 601. Her dream is to design, build, and pilot spacecraft.

Pilot and EAAer Carol Ann Garratt followed Anousheh at the podium. She shared her dream to see the Earth by rounding the world in her Mooney. "Carol Ann...was the seventh woman to fly around the world," said first-time Women Soar participant Amanda Szekeres. "That was so

amazing to hear about and to know that one day I could possibly do that.” Mentor and former Air Force pilot Karen Courington later remarked how the accomplishments of both speakers “will influence young women—myself included—to dream big and pursue their goals of flight with enthusiasm and determination.”

The evening program ended with the girls meeting informally, one-on-one with the speakers and then participating in an aviation fact-finding scavenger hunt throughout the museum. (Visit [www.EAA.org/video](http://www.EAA.org/video) to see more from the evening.) For attendee Stephanie Bolin, who came to Women Soar with her sisters Ashley and Natalie, the scavenger hunt made a connection. “All of the kids got to explore the neat exhibits while finding answers to the questions. We were also all split up into random groups, which let us get to know the other girls there.”

The girls camped out in the Eagle Hangar, some under wings of the mighty warbirds on display. It wasn’t exactly the North 40, but they got the idea. The next morning after breakfast, EAA AirVenture opening day, there were breakout sessions, more inspirational speakers, and Living History sessions.

For the breakout sessions, the girls split up into groups of 10 with two or three mentors, inside and outside the museum. During the first session mentors talked about their careers and obstacles they overcame and answered the girls’ questions afterward. In the second session, the tables turned with the mentors asking the girls questions, mostly about their career aspirations and dreams, and offered advice on how to make it happen.

The Living History session began with several members of the WASP who talked about what it was like to serve their country during World War II, when the military didn’t officially accept them. The accomplishments of the WASP became even more evident when today’s women in aviation took the stage for Living History 2. Among the panelists were women in science, aerospace, business, the military, and commercial, air show, and general aviation. A visit from Amelia Earhart and Bessie Coleman impersonators in between sessions added another exciting historical element.

In addition to the above sessions, Long and Brig. Gen. Janet Therianos spoke to the girls about their military careers. “Jill Long was one of my favorite speakers,” said Stephanie Bolin. “She was a combat pilot who had a lot of stories to share and advice to give.” Lt. Col. Long, who will be attending her fourth Women Soar program in 2008, said, “I come back for the girls who have a spark in their eyes, the ones you can tell are going places and who need to hear that they can.”

By midday, it was time for the formal program to end, and the informal program to begin: exploring EAA AirVenture. Each girl was given a wristband and encouraged to check out everything AirVenture has to offer, including the air show, exhibit booths, AeroShell Square, and other aircraft areas. Afterward, they could see the Beach Boys in concert and attend the space-themed Theater in



Women Soar 2007 mentors

Amy Gesh




A group of girls gathered around keynote speaker Anousheh Ansari for questions and autographs.

Amy Gesh

the Woods program that evening, which many did. What a way to end the day.

“It was great meeting the girls from all over,” said Women Soar coordinator Lesley Poberezny. “Even better was hearing from some of them afterwards via e-mail and cards, and finding out that they keep in touch with some of the girls and mentors they met here.” Several of the girls have already called about attending Women Soar this summer.

The 2008 program, now called Women Soar—You Soar, will be held the first days of EAA AirVenture (July 28-29). While some of the elements from previous years remain, such as the challenge course activities, scholarships, mentors, and historical programs, there will be more emphasis on aviation and aerospace hands-on activities, such as flight simulation and wing rib assembly. EAA also has partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh for an on-campus air and space educational program and overnight stay in the dorms for a taste of college life.

Look for more details about the 2008 Women Soar—You Soar program in future magazine issues. In the meantime, visit [www.AirVenture.org/WomenSoar](http://www.AirVenture.org/WomenSoar), which also provides downloadable registration materials, or call 800-236-1025 for updates. 

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