

HORIZONS

Views and Perspectives from
WEST MICHIGAN
AVIATION ACADEMY

Fall 2024

“I Wouldn’t Be Here Without WMAA”

Many kids in West Michigan grow up camping or renting a cottage for summer vacations. Winston Richards had a little different experience.

“I lived next to Somerville Airport in Ada,” he recalls. “We had a hangar out back where my dad and a few buddies kept a small Cessna. We would go to air shows in the summer, or fly ourselves somewhere like Mackinac Island for summer vacations.”

Small wonder, then, that Winston dreamed of being a pilot from the time he was little. All of his childhood photos include either a toy airplane or Spartan-themed clothes! His dad, “a lawyer for work and a pilot for fun,” inspired Winston’s decision to attend WMAA as a junior to fulfill that dream.

“I started out at another high school with my friends,” Winston shares. “It was a big leap to change schools. My dad suggested that WMAA offered the best opportunity to become a pilot. He didn’t force me to change schools, however...that was my choice. I did a shadow day during my sophomore year and felt like WMAA was the right fit. It was a challenging transition but the growing pains were short-lived. I made friends quickly, and the school was exactly what I hoped it would be. I flourished at WMAA.”

Winston graduated in 2015 with his private pilot license and a full ride to Michigan State University through the Air Force ROTC program. He was commissioned into the Air Force and recently completed his aircraft commander training. “My dad was really into history,” he recalls. “I grew up sharing his pride in being an American, and knew I wanted to join the military.”

The next few years were pivotal for Winston. “My dad lost his flight status when he was diagnosed with cancer while I was in high school,” Winston said. “I was able to fly us on a couple great vacations before he died in 2019. We island-hopped in Michigan, and experienced the solar eclipse in Kentucky. We enjoyed America from the air as we traveled together. Those memories are priceless.”

Winston’s dad inspired him to achieve in many ways. “We shared a love of judo, and I earned my black belt. We did Scouts together. My dad was my support system and inspiration. He gave me the confidence to do so many things, including learning to fly.”

Winston is incredibly grateful to WMAA for the opportunities that set him up for success. “I wouldn’t have had a private pilot license at age 18 if it wasn’t for WMAA,” he says. “I wouldn’t be living my dream of serving my country. I am grateful for the mentorship, the life skills, and the excellent flight education that gave me an edge in the highly-competitive military program.”



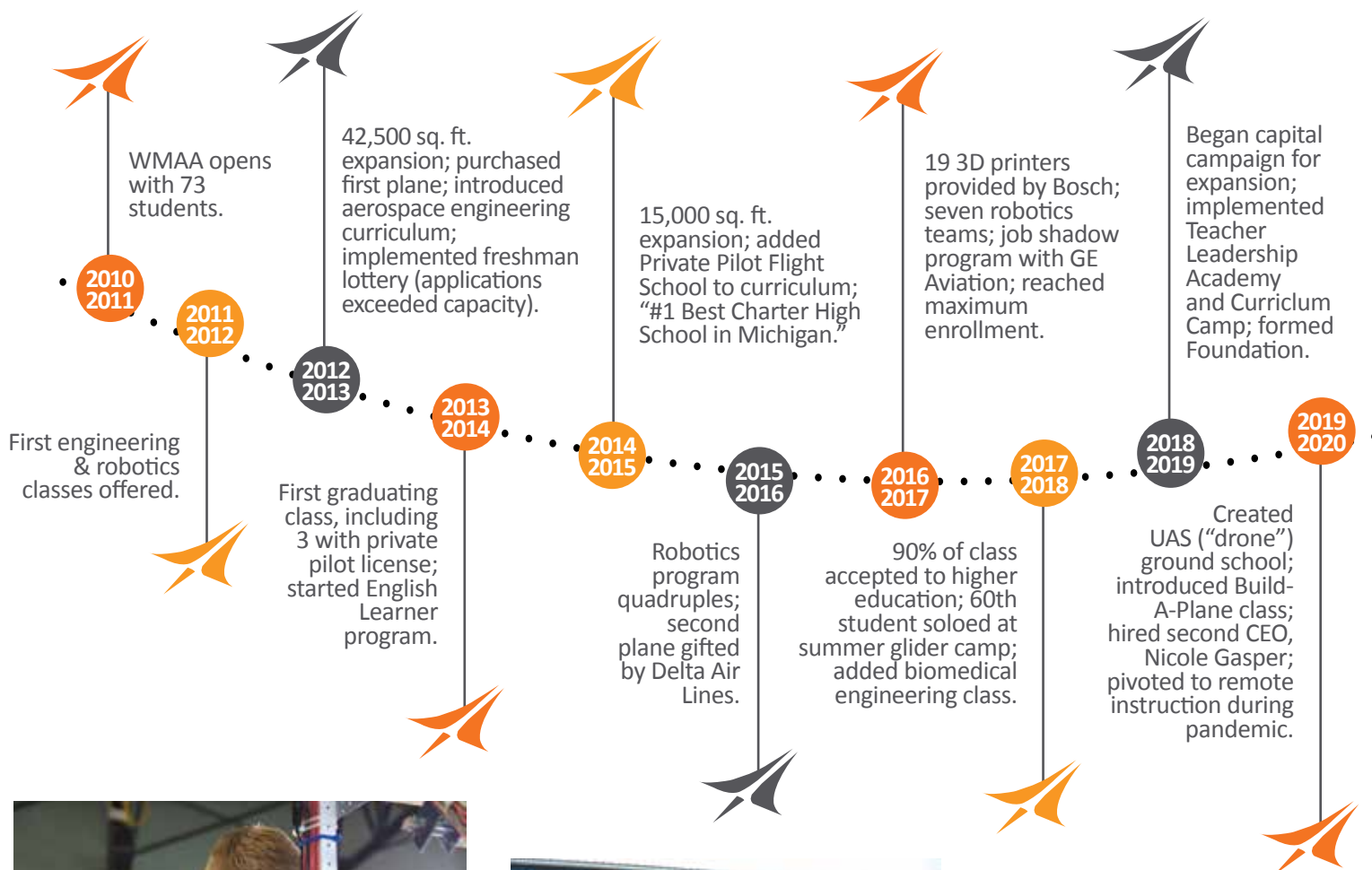
Winston Richards and his dad, who inspired him to pursue aviation.

Thank you, donors, for the financial support that gives students like Winston the opportunity to fulfill their dreams.

Entering Our 15th Year

WMAA opened its doors in September 2010, and reached its maximum capacity of 620 students in the 2016/17 school year. This school has tapped a responsive chord with students and parents alike. They are seeking exactly what WMAA offers: a rigorous yet supportive environment in which all students can fully achieve their dreams.

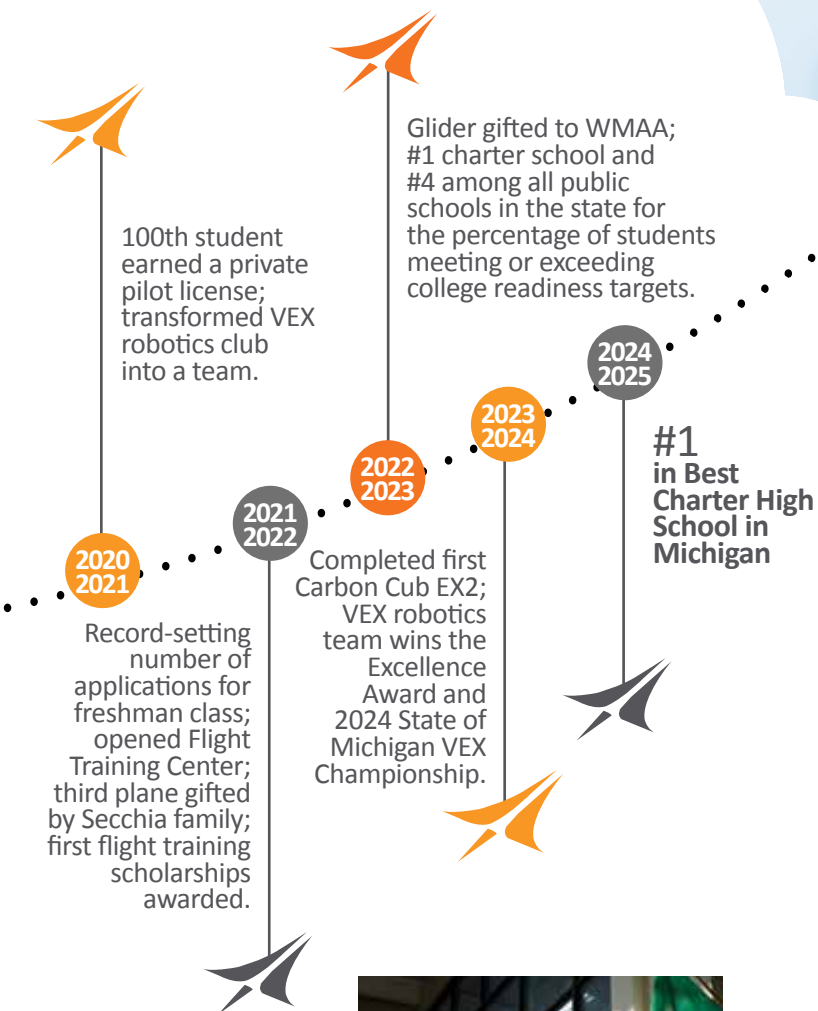
Following are just a few of the many highlights from the last 15 years. We sincerely thank the donors, families, students and staff that have made this amazing school what it is today!



First Build-A-Plane, Carbon Cub EX2



Class of 2021 pilots



FTC opening

Fun Facts



The student body hovers around 68-69% male and 31-32% female.



The ethnicity of our student body overall very closely mirrors the ethnicity distribution of Kent County.



This year, 19 languages (other than English) are spoken in our students' homes.



Our students come from more than 50 schools, some as much as an hour away.



We fly a collection of more than 50 flags in our commons area, representing the birth countries of the student body.



5363 44th St SE
Grand Rapids MI 49512



Thank You for a Great Breakfast!

Thank you to all the table hosts and guests who attended our Broadening Horizons Breakfast on October 3. This annual Breakfast is a wonderful way for new people to connect to WMAA. Our staff, students and board did a fabulous job of sharing stories that are the essence of WMAA: culture, achievement, empowerment and opportunity.

We sincerely appreciate each dollar that was given, and look forward to enriching student lives in the coming year thanks to your generosity!



Save the Date: May 15, 2025

Our 14th annual Leaders of Tomorrow Gala on Thursday, May 15, 2025 will be an evening you don't want to miss! Full of inspiration and engagement, this event celebrates WMAA's impact on students and our broader community.

Please visit our website to learn more about the event and sponsorship opportunities. Sponsors help underwrite the cost of the event so that 100% of all gifts go to support the amazing opportunities and experiences offered to WMAA students. If you would like to be a new sponsor, please email Meggan George to join our mailing list.

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