

lems in settings such as search-and-rescue exercises and whitewater rafting.

"I want [the workshops] to be known as the Outward Bound of aviation," says Castner, 58.

The workshops were crafted over seven years of personal and academic research. In 1998, Castner began to grow curious as to why only around 1 out of 17 flight-school students were female when learning to fly seemed like such a great confidence builder. That, combined with her growing boredom with the laborious details of helping to run a family-owned airport, prompted her to delve into the reasons behind her gender's seeming reluctance to defy gravity.

"It was more of a reason to get up in the morning for me to do research and find out what empowered women than it was to roll an airplane out and rent it to somebody to fly from here to the Delaware River and back," says Castner.

Castner proceeded to interview hundreds of women. Some were pilots; most weren't. She found that many female aviators had become passionate about flying through the men in their lives. The majority of those with no pilot training were simply scared of it.

Castner's anecdotal findings piqued the interest of Sue Stafford, a pilot and the philosophy chair at Simmons College in Boston. The two became research partners and obtained more than \$20,000 in grants, one of which came from the Wolf Aviation Fund, a foundation that promotes general aviation. They then conducted three formal research workshops over the last two years with a total of 36 female subjects.

## A Family Says 'Come Fly with Us'

Linda Castner's family has owned the land under Alexandria Field, which started operating in 1944, for some 150 years. Castner, who took over the reins with her brother in 1994, says keeping a general aviation airport profitable is a hands-on, around-the-clock labor of love that requires creativity. Along with offering scenic tours and flight instruction courses using a fleet of five propeller planes, Castner and her brother sell fuel and oil for planes; rent hangar and tie-down space; and broker small-aircraft deals. They also rent space to Slate Line Aviation, a maintenance shop specializing in general aviation aircraft. In addition to the Take Flight programs, Castner's company Up, Up, and Away in Haverden runs an aviation education camp for kids and offers emergency-maneuver training.

The state Department of Transportation recently purchased the development rights to the airfield for \$1.18 million as part its effort to stem the loss of general aviation airports in the state. As a result, the property can only be used for airport purposes.

General aviation is a broad category that generally refers to personal flying. Total general aviation airports in the Garden State have decreased from 82 in 1950 to 45 in 2005, according to a recent DOT notice.

organization that claims a membership of 400,000 U.S. pilots, says there were 173 accidents involving small general aviation aircraft during flight training in 2003, the last year for which numbers are available. There were 17 fatalities.

Castner, though, says these numbers don't relate to her workshops. "There's not one statistic that says in the first two hours of flight training anybody has ever been hurt or died," she says, referring to the period of time workshop participants are airborne. The association's report does not provide data on the time into flight training that the accidents occurred.

The long-time pilot says it's the perceived risk of flying a plane that makes people, especially those looking to advance their careers, more likely to absorb piloting's valuable les-

sons than similar principles put forth by traditional methods.

"I remember my first solo flight like it was yesterday. I can smell the airplane. I can remember how fast the wind was blowing," says Castner. "Ask me the first time I got an 'A' on a test."

She says there has been a lot of interest from companies and individuals regarding the programs, but while Simmons College has agreed to run the workshops in Boston, it's not clear when the next one will take place in New Jersey. Castner believes they will catch on locally, however. "These workshops are part of the overall business plan to offer more to the community than what a normal airport would offer," she says. ♦

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