

The workshop is structured around three key competencies: self-confidence, adaptability and collaboration. Participants explore them on the ground through lectures, group discussion and journal reflection, and then take to the sky to put their learning into practice.

Of the dozen business leaders who took to the skies in the latest workshop one weekend in September, the eighth in the project's seven-year history, only a few had ever helped command an aircraft in any way.

Terry Palmieri, vice president of finance at Eracent, Inc., an Internet tech company based in Fairfax, Va., was one. Though she had assisted in small-craft flight before, she had never sat in the pilot's seat.

Beaming on the ground after just landing her second flight, she described the feeling. "You're nervous, but you're not scared," she said. "You go through the visualization beforehand and you have a competent instructor next to you."

Roslyn Taylor, a budget manager at Simmons College, the country's only business school for women, had never co-piloted an aircraft, and had a fear of flying before the weekend began. She mustered up the courage to take the yoke anyway. By her second day, she was feeling some confidence.

"I was really scared, so this has been a real challenge for me," Taylor said. "It is getting easier though. I'm a lot better today."

As she pulled her Cessna in for a landing, she radioed in like a pro: "Alexandria traffic, blue and white Cessna, final for runway 26."

Trailblazers in the Sky

The student pilots didn't fly quite far enough to see Newark, but the spirit of one of its historical moments was present nonetheless. Amelia Earhart once eased her small plane onto the ground there and became the first pilot, man or woman, to solo a flight from the bottom to the top of the United States.

Earhart also pioneered the first solo flight across the Pacific from Honolulu to Oakland, Calif., on Jan. 11, 1935 and lost her life attempting to solo a flight around the world in 1937.

"Women must try to do things as men have tried," Earhart once told George Putnam, her partner and publisher. "When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others."

Many know of her courageous and remarkable career, as short-lived as it was, but few are aware of the long and diverse history of women in flight.

From E. Lillian Todd, who designed and built aircraft in 1906 to Helen Richey, who became the first woman pilot for a U.S. commercial airline in 1934, women have taken on crucial roles in the forwarding of the industry. In 1999, astronaut Eileen Collins