



Christa Jankeviciute

# On Your Wing

## Meet a NAFI member

By Patrick Howell

**W**hen NAFI Director of Publications and Editor Beth Stanton asked me to start a new column for *Mentor* that highlights NAFI members, we spent some time discussing what to call it. When we pondered what we wanted to highlight with this column, we hit on the theme of NAFI as a *community* of flight instructors.

We picked a suitable aviation theme for it — wingman. What is a wingman? It is someone who flies in formation with you, providing support as you also support them. We hope you get that sense of community from this column — of having someone on your wing you can meet and bounce ideas off. Without further ado, let's meet Christa Jankeviciute.

**Patrick:** You mentioned your path to aviation wasn't the straightest. Tell us about that.

**Christa:** My aviation journey started when I was growing up. My family would fly from Lithuania, where I was born. The flight was always my favorite part of the trip, and I looked up to the team of flight attendants and pilots. When I was in high school, I had the opportunity to be part of a kid's aviation club in Colorado called HAWK, High Country Aviation Workshop for Kids. I rode my bike 12 miles to the airport and spent every Saturday learning how to cut and rivet sheet metal. I met some fantastic mentors who encouraged and guided me, and I was able to fly hot air balloons, motorgliders, and a Piper

Cherokee. I also attended GirlVenture at Oshkosh through HAWK's support. I continued my flying career by attending L3Harris Flight Academy and got my CFI and CFII certificates. Then I joined an incredible team of flight instructors in Pensacola, Florida, at AMS Flight School.

**Patrick:** You said you're paying it forward by mentoring the next generation.


**Christa:** A couple months into my flight instructor journey I started working with a group of girls for this summer's JROTC flight program. My student base previously had consisted of students older than me (I am 20 years old), so transitioning to a roster with younger students was a bit of a change. However, the girls are motivated and doing well as they progress. Just as iron sharpens iron, my students gain a better comprehension of aviation knowledge by helping their peers find their weak points. I encourage them to give feedback and encouragement to each other during a training flight.

**Patrick:** Can you give us the biggest highlight of your instructing journey so far?

**Christa:** I love my job! From the time I saw the beaming smile of my student getting out of the airplane after their first solo, to seeing dolphins in the gulf below as we flew, to seeing the moon shine off the bay while completing our night cross-countries. I have had the opportunity to work with a variety of students, which brought me to realize that instructing

harbors a deeper meaning for me beyond simply flying in circles for a couple hours. I have discovered that I possess the ability to challenge and help people grow as they seek to add a new piece to themselves. I find great inspiration in teaching eager students and helping those with less motivation to find the purpose in why they showed up to the airfield in the first place.

**Patrick:** What's one thing looking back you wish you could have told yourself at the beginning?

**Christa:** Having patience with my own training and trusting God in the process of my career as a female pilot and flight instructor. A flying career is not always a fast track to a cushy airline job, and sometimes it takes longer than expected to reach your goals. Looking at my life now makes me realize how thankful I am for the journey. I wish I had known earlier to work on developing myself into a good role model that others would want to follow. Flying has offered me a great opportunity to create the life I want with a career I enjoy. I am so blessed to be where I am today. 

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**Patrick Howell** is a CFI/CFII/MEI, CSIP, and NAFI Associate Master Flight Instructor. He is a former B-52H Stratofortress instructor navigator. Howell teaches with Revv Aviation at KCBF in Council Bluffs, Iowa. When he's not teaching, he's remembering how to use his feet again in a 1947 Aeronca Champ. Howell is glad he's finally found a use for that English degree he got in college.