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**Karl Cotton Receives HAI's Salute to Excellence
W.A. "Dub" Blessing Flight Instructor of the Year Award**

Alexandria, Virginia (Jan. 11, 2023) – Helicopter Association International (HAI) is pleased to announce Karl Cotton as the recipient of the 2023 Salute to Excellence W.A. "Dub" Blessing Flight Instructor of the Year Award. This award, presented by Hill Air Corporation, recognizes superlative contributions by a helicopter flight instructor or a UAS flight instructor in upholding high standards of professionalism. It will be presented Mar. 6, 2023, at HAI HELI-EXPO 2023 in Atlanta, Georgia.

Cotton has a simple philosophy: if a student isn't successful, it's a reflection on the instructor.

"There's usually a way to get through to somebody if they're struggling," Cotton explains. "I am a really big believer in bringing kind of a stoke to flight training. There's nothing about training that should cause the students to suffer. It should be challenging but should be an overall pleasant experience. That's really what I try to bring out, a challenging but fun experience."

Cotton's journey to flight instructor and mentor for countless students started on the ski slopes of Utah. He'd begun heli-skiing in the late 1970s and quickly became hooked on helicopters. He soon started learning to fly.

Cotton began instructing as soon as he received his flight instructor rating and, a little over 700 hours later, landed his first turbine helicopter job as a tour pilot at Grand Canyon Helicopters. From there, he took a utility flying job performing seismic exploration throughout the Rocky Mountains during the 1980s oil boom before landing at the Arizona Department of Public Safety as an officer pilot and flight instructor.

Cotton's law enforcement experience in Arizona opened the door for a position with the Los Angeles County (California) Fire Department, where he taught various flight techniques, from swift and blue water rescue to aerial firefighting, high-rise fire rescue, and hoist training.

Since that time, Cotton has worked as a short-haul pilot for three US national parks and has served as a chief instructor at flight schools, including Leading Edge Aviation in Bend, Oregon, where he runs the night-vision goggles (NVG) program to this day. He also holds a designated pilot examiner certification and has administered more than 1,000 pilot examinations.

Today, Cotton is the senior flight instructor at Helicopter Institute, an OEM-level training facility that offers initial and advanced instruction in Bell aircraft to customers around the country. Cotton serves as the field pilot, traveling to customers and providing customized training in their aircraft. With his vast and varied background of skills in mountain flying, law enforcement, NVG flight, fire and rescue, instrument instruction, and more, he provides just about any kind of training a customer needs.

Yet, while his impressive breadth of skills and experience speaks volumes, it's how Cotton approaches his work that really stands out to his customers. He's easygoing and puts his students at ease, even earning the impressive compliment of making check rides fun.

“Karl comes to the table with thousands of hours having flown many different profiles and missions,” says Deputy Josh Sweeney of Washington state’s King County Sheriff’s Office. “He is a great communicator and makes sure to constantly pass on this knowledge and experience to those he is instructing. What’s even more amazing, Karl is never satisfied with the knowledge he has gained and always shows up with new and refined techniques to accomplish a task. Karl has inspired me to be a better pilot and a better instructor.”

The W.A. “Dub” Blessing Flight Instructor of the Year Award will be presented during HAI HELI-EXPO 2023. HAI HELI-EXPO®, the world’s largest helicopter trade show and exhibition, will be held at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta, Georgia, Mar. 6–9, with the exhibit hall open Mar. 7–9. For more information on HAI HELI-EXPO 2023, visit heliexpo.com.

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HAI is the professional trade association for the international helicopter industry and represents more than 1,100 companies and over 16,000 industry professionals in more than 65 countries. Each year, HAI members safely operate more than 3,700 helicopters and remotely piloted aircraft approximately 2.9 million hours. HAI is dedicated to the promotion of the helicopter as a safe, effective method of commerce and to the advancement of the international helicopter community.