



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
June 03, 2024  
Contact: Dan Sweet  
Phone: 503-970-4449  
Email: dans@verticalavi.org

## **PRESS RELEASE**

# **VAI Expands Annual Awards Program Honoring Industry Professionals**

***Nominations are now being accepted for the 2025 Salute to Excellence Awards program.***

**Alexandria, VA (June 03, 2024)** – With Vertical Aviation International (VAI) embracing the entire vertical aviation industry, the organization is opening its annual Salute to Excellence Awards program to welcome new participants. This expansion includes a significant addition: a new award that pays tribute to the late Harold Summers, a figure whose legacy and spirit continue to inspire the vertical flight industry.

The nomination period for the 2025 Salute to Excellence Awards opens today, Jun. 3, 2024, and will run through Sep. 30, 2024, with no extensions. VAI will announce the award recipients in early 2025. Membership in VAI is not required to submit a nomination or to receive an award.

VAI's newest Salute to Excellence Award, the Harold Summers Legacy Award is a testament to the respect and admiration held throughout the industry for the association's longtime director of maintenance Harold Summers, who passed away in October 2021.

During a career that exceeded 60 years, Summers was widely recognized for his tireless efforts to improve and support every part of the rotorcraft industry. In recognition of her unwavering support of her late husband, Zhilin Summers was the inaugural recipient of the Harold Summers Legacy Award, presented in February at HAI HELI-EXPO 2024 in Anaheim, California.

"Our Salute to Excellence Awards program has always recognized special achievement by individuals or groups throughout our industry," says VAI President and CEO James Viola. "Our goal with this award is to recognize Harold's passion for the industry, particularly his enduring efforts to improve every part of it."

Viola shared the inspiration behind the new award in a January press release. "HAI received numerous suggestions on how to honor Harold's spirit and legacy," said Viola.

### **Vertical Aviation International**

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“I am grateful to the VAI Technical and Maintenance Working Group, which proposed this idea and made it a reality.”

The Harold Summers Legacy Award acknowledges superlative contributions by an individual to improve the vertical flight industry. While this award is open across all industry segments, special emphasis on maintenance personnel is encouraged, to reflect Summers’s career path.

Now featuring 11 award categories, the Salute to Excellence Awards recognize outstanding contributions by people working throughout the vertical aviation industry. Some of the awards acknowledge superior efforts by individuals, and several are open to teams and companies.

VAI believes it is only a matter of time before the Salute to Excellence Awards program receives nominations for people working in the advanced air mobility sector.

“We specifically changed the language of our awards criteria several years ago to include drones and other UAS [uncrewed aircraft system] aircraft,” Viola notes. “Since then, we’ve honored several UAS operators with awards, and we look forward to receiving nominations for exceptional people working in advanced air mobility soon.”

VAI is currently accepting nominations for all 11 Salute to Excellence Awards:

- Harold Summers Legacy Award
- Matthew S. Zuccaro Land & LIVE Award
- Communications Award
- Humanitarian Service Award
- W.A. “Dub” Blessing Flight Instructor of the Year Award
- Law Enforcement Award
- Golden Hour Award
- Safety Award
- Maintenance Award
- Pilot of the Year Award
- Lifetime Achievement Award.

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Information on the criteria for each award and the nomination process is available on VAI's website. VAI strongly encourages nominators to review suggestions on that page to submit successful award packages.

"Each of us knows someone in our industry niche who is worthy of an award," says Tanya Kirchner, VAI director of conventions and Salute to Excellence Awards program coordinator. "There's no need to rush to submit your nomination for that person. Take the time to explain their impact on the industry and provide supporting details. Show us who they are and why they deserve the award."

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**About Vertical Aviation International (VAI):** Vertical Aviation International (VAI) is the world's leading membership association dedicated to the vertical aviation industry, which encompasses all aircraft capable of vertical or short takeoff and landing. By fueling industry growth through connection, advocacy, safety, education, and support for its members' success, VAI strives to leverage the power of vertical flight to strengthen communities worldwide. The association welcomes all facets of the vertical aviation industry, including manufacturers, operators, suppliers and vendors, pilots and maintenance technicians, and other aviation professionals. For more information about VAI, please visit [rotor.org/newbrand](http://rotor.org/newbrand).