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

*Alexandria, Virginia (Jan. 09, 2024)* – Helicopter Association International (HAI) is pleased to announce Chinook Helicopters CEO Catherine Press as the recipient of the 2024 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 on Feb. 26, 2024 at HAI HELI-EXPO 2024 in Anaheim, California.

Press is a pioneer in not only flight instruction but in the entire Canadian helicopter industry. She began flying her dad's floatplane at 11 years of age, soloing her first airplane at 16. When her father purchased a Bell 47 and started Chinook Helicopters in 1983, Cathy learned to fly that aircraft, as well, and on her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday she earned private licenses in both airplanes and helicopters. At the time, she was one of only half a dozen female helicopter pilots in Canada.

Press gained business and customer service experience working at Chinook Helicopters, and after she earned her commercial licenses in airplanes and helicopters, she began flying for the family business too, performing charters, electronic news-gathering, aerial-survey, search-and-rescue, and forestry missions. At age 21, she completed her airplane flight instructor rating, and in 1997, at age 27, she earned her helicopter flight instructor rating, becoming Canada's first female helicopter flight instructor.

"Toward the end of my flight instructor flight test, I asked the examiner, who came from Ottawa to do the test, how many female flight instructors there were in Canada," Press recalls. "He said 'one' and I asked who she was. He said, 'It's you! Congratulations!'"

Press dove headfirst into flight instructing, teaching up to 1,200 hours a year as she helped build up Chinook Helicopters into one of the country's largest flight schools. A passionate learner, she studied for and earned her ratings from the United States, China, and the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). She most recently acquired the ability to teach in Canada for EASA certification.

Press, who has more than 10,000 hours of flight instruction time, is the only person in Canada to hold Transport Canada pilot examiner status in both airplanes and helicopters. She has received Canada's David Charles Abramson Memorial (DCAM) Flight Instructor Safety Award in recognition of her achievements, and in 2021 was awarded an honorary doctorate of technology through the University of the Fraser Valley, in British Columbia.

"Cathy's willingness to take chances and support individuals to reach their potential is quite admirable," writes Chinook Helicopters Chief Pilot Bill Snedden in his nomination of Press. "She exudes positivity and maintains

## W.A. "DUB" BLESSING FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

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connectivity with the Canadian aviation industry and regulatory bodies. Cathy drives the aviation industry forward with her incredible leadership and continual involvement within the community. The impact she has had on the pilots she has trained, employed, and networked with, has been life-changing for them.”

In addition to flying, Press built Chinook Helicopters from a 3-aircraft school into a 16-helicopter, 14-airplane professional flight training academy. She also pulled together a team for the school to develop and receive Transport Canada approval to build four in-house flight training devices, a move she says saved the company tens of thousands of dollars over purchasing the devices.

Press also gives back to the aviation community. She is currently vice chair of the Helicopter Association of Canada’s board of directors and chair of the association’s Flight Training Committee. Press is also a board member for the British Columbia Aviation Council and a past board member of the International Women’s Forum. She also serves on the British Columbia Institute of Technology’s Aviation Advisory Committee and remains deeply involved in student mentorship programs.

“I always wanted to be a teacher, and I was surrounded by aviation, so becoming a flight instructor was the perfect combination of my two passions,” she says. “That’s why I’ve not gone away and had a career longlining in large helicopters in other countries. I’ve stayed with the training because I really do enjoy people. I enjoy seeing, and I enjoy being a part of, their successes.”

The W.A. “Dub” Blessing Flight Instructor of the Year Award will be presented during HAI HELI-EXPO 2024. HAI HELI-EXPO<sup>®</sup>, the world’s largest helicopter trade show and exhibition, will be held at the Anaheim Convention Center in Anaheim, California, Feb. 26–29, with the exhibit hall open Feb. 27–29. For more information on HAI HELI-EXPO 2024, visit [heliexpo.com](https://heliexpo.com).

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*HAI is the professional trade association for the global 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 business tool that provides unique advantages to society and to the advancement of the international vertical aviation community.*