
Dedicated to the Advancement of the International Helicopter Community

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 14, 2022

Contact: Dan Sweet

Phone: 703-683-4646

Email: dan.sweet@rotor.org

HAI Marks the Passing of Helicopter Pioneer Frank Robinson

Robinson Helicopter founder's vision of affordable helicopters led to a global fleet of 13,000 aircraft

Alexandria, Va. (November 14, 2022) – Helicopter Association International (HAI) is deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Frank Robinson, founder of Robinson Helicopter Company. Born in 1930, Frank passed away on November 12, 2022, at his California home.

“Our industry lost a giant over the weekend,” says James Viola, president and CEO of HAI. “We extend our deepest condolences to the Robinsons and to all the men and women who are part of the Robinson Helicopter Company family. We share your grief in the loss of a man so many admired. I’m happy and proud to say that I had the pleasure of first meeting Frank in 2006 at a Robinson pilot safety course. I benefited from his perspective then and in later years.”

Frank was inspired to study engineering when he saw a newspaper photo of Igor Sikorsky flying the VS-300 in 1939. He became an acknowledged expert in tail rotors at both Bell and Hughes Helicopters, where he led the tail rotor design team on what is now the MD 500. Frank left Hughes in 1973 to found his own company, with a vision of making affordable helicopters.

“My father really wanted to see the private market—not even the commercial market but the private market—for helicopters grow,” said his son, Kurt Robinson, president and chairman of Robinson Helicopter Company, in a 2014 interview with ROTOR magazine. “He wanted to build a helicopter ... that anyone could fly to get from one place to another.”

Remarkably, in just six years, Frank was able to design, certify, and deliver the R22, a two-seat, piston-powered helicopter, and it quickly became popular as a training helicopter and with private owners. Robinson launched the four-seat R44 model in the early 1990s and then added a five-seat turbine model, the R66, in 2010.

“As a proud owner of a Robinson R44, I am an example of the general aviation owner that Frank sought to serve, and I am grateful for his efforts to make rotorcraft flight accessible to the public,” says Viola. “By focusing on the private market, he cemented his place as a pioneer in our industry.”

The recipient of numerous aviation awards for his achievements and vision, including a lifetime HAI membership, Frank retired in 2010 at the age of 80. But his greatest legacy is the company he founded in his living room in 1973, which from its Torrance, California, headquarters continues to manufacture helicopters for shipment all over the world.

####

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.