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HAI Applauds North Dakota Rotor Pathway Program Rollout

Alexandria, Virginia (March 1, 2023) – Helicopter Association International (HAI) applauds the leadership of the University of North Dakota (UND) in rolling out the North Dakota Rotor Pathway Program.

The program provides aviation classes that incorporate vertical aviation to high school students by teaming up with industry members, high schools, post-secondary schools, and other stakeholders. The students earn college credits while still in high school and are offered mentoring, internships, and job interviews upon completing the college-level aviation program.

“The rollout of the North Dakota Rotor Pathway Program is a testament to the dedication, professionalism, and love of aviation found among aviation leaders in North Dakota. UND has consistently brought innovative solutions forward and once again steps up to tackle the issue of workforce development,” says HAI VP of Government Affairs Cade Clark. “UND is well known for the caliber of pilots it produces. I am excited to see the Pathway program introduced in North Dakota with such great partners.”

“Our state relies on aviation, especially for agricultural and emergency services. I am excited that North Dakota can stand up this program advancing opportunities for the next generation of pilots as well as growing the numbers of those pilots,” says Mike McHugh, Education Coordinator at North Dakota Aeronautics Commission. “I look forward to working with all our stakeholders in growing this program.”

“Our school is committed to providing the highest-quality training for our students,” says Wesley Van Dell, chief flight instructor, rotorcraft, flight operations, at UND. “We are excited to extend the opportunities in the helicopter industry to more students and show them that the future is very bright.”

Mark Schlaefli of Black Hills Aerial Adventures and Yellowstone Helicopters has stepped forward as an eager industry partner. “Part of our stated purpose as operators is to help develop the next generation of technicians and pilots who have an interest in vertical aviation. It is imperative that we as an industry help turn that interest into a passion. I was fortunate to have mentors throughout my journey, and we have a calling to give back and help a new generation of rotor pilots find their place in vertical aviation.”

Leslie Martin, associate professor, aviation, at UND, teaches the program at a local high school in Grand Forks. “Interacting with these young students with such passion is inspiring,” says Martin. “These students are excited to learn about how they can participate and succeed in vertical aviation. Their passion is genuine, and I have no doubts about their success. I am excited to bring the benefits of this program to them.”

The North Dakota Rotor Pathway Program builds on the success of the inaugural Rotor Pathway Program established in Utah, which serves as a national model for education and training programs that prepare students for STEM careers. “This type of program creates a win for everyone involved: students get the education they need for in-demand careers while industry creates a workforce development pipeline that enables it to grow. I applaud all stakeholders involved for being willing to step up and be part of a solution,” Clark says.

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HAI is the professional trade association for the global vertical aviation 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 aircraft approximately 2.9 million hours. HAI is dedicated to the promotion of rotorcraft as a safe, effective business tool that provides unique advantages to society and to the advancement of the international vertical aviation community.