



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

Vertical Aviation International Celebrates Industry Giants with Lifetime Achievement Awards

VAI honors four exceptional leaders for their pioneering contributions to, sustained excellence in, the vertical aviation industry, at VERTICON 2025.

Alexandria, Virginia, USA (Jan. 23, 2025) – Vertical Aviation International (VAI) is proud to recognize the distinguished recipients of this year’s Salute to Excellence Lifetime Achievement Award. As part of a strategic rebranding initiative and in response to the exceptional caliber of nominees, VAI has chosen to honor multiple professionals from the vertical flight industry who have demonstrated significant impact, sustained commitment, and leadership throughout their careers.

VAI’s 2025 Salute to Excellence Lifetime Achievement Awards are graciously sponsored by Bell.

This year, the Lifetime Achievement Award celebrates those who have not only contributed to advancements and innovations within the industry but have also inspired and mentored the next generation, embodying the spirit of excellence that VAI strives to promote. The decision to expand the number of awardees allows VAI to acknowledge the substantial contributions of several outstanding individuals who might otherwise conclude their careers without such recognition.

“We are immensely proud to recognize this year’s Lifetime Achievement Award recipients, each of whom has made transformative contributions to the vertical aviation industry,” says James Viola, president and CEO of VAI. “By honoring multiple outstanding individuals this year, we not only celebrate their enduring impact and leadership but also reflect our commitment to adapting and responding to the evolving needs of our industry and its distinguished professionals.”

The recipients of this year’s awards have left an indelible mark on the industry through decades of service, leadership, and mentorship. Their careers are highlighted by transformative effects on their companies and the industry, fostering talent and advocating for positive change.

2025 Salute to Excellence Lifetime Achievement Recipient: Pat Attaway

Pat Attaway is honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award recognizing his extensive contributions to the vertical aviation industry. Attaway, who currently serves as director of operations at PHI Americas, has a robust career spanning 35 years in the field, starting as a US Navy helicopter pilot before moving into various leadership roles that

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included managing PHI operations across multiple countries and pioneering the use of the Sikorsky S-92 in commercial service. His leadership extended beyond PHI as he chaired the Helicopter Safety Advisory Conference and the Operational Effectiveness Workstream with HeliOffshore, driving the industry toward safer practices and the adoption of Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) for safer helicopter operations. Attaway's passion for helicopters was ignited during college through summer jobs in Louisiana's oil-and-gas industry, which introduced him to flying.

2025 Salute to Excellence Lifetime Achievement Recipient: René Closter

René Closter receives a Lifetime Achievement Award for his commitment to aviation and rescue services that has had a profound impact on saving lives and advancing the capabilities of air rescue operations globally. Closter's career began in Luxembourg's fire brigade before advancing into the international financial sector. A helicopter pilot and paramedic, he pledged his home as the initial collateral to form Luxembourg Air Rescue (LAR) in 1988 and became its CEO in 1995, serving in that position until May 2021. Under his leadership, LAR expanded to operate a fleet of seven helicopters and five jets, conducting over 70,000 missions. Closter has personally been involved in over 14,000 rescues and served in significant roles, including VP of DRF Luftrettung, an air ambulance service, and as a technical advisor for Luxembourg's national rescue services.

2025 Salute to Excellence Lifetime Achievement Recipient: Thierry Couderc

Thierry Couderc has been bestowed a Lifetime Achievement Award for his instrumental efforts to bridge the needs of the French rotorcraft community with those of the broader European landscape, as well as for helping the European Helicopter Association (EHA) navigate the complexities of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency's (EASA's) regulatory framework. Currently, Couderc serves as EHA's VP and as executive director of the French helicopter association Union Francaise de l'Helicoptere. His leadership in the Council of European Aerospace Societies Rotorcraft Committee and the European Safety Promotion Network Rotorcraft (ESPN-R) has been crucial in promoting safety, enhancing training, and advancing safety technologies within the rotorcraft community. Beyond his regulatory and safety contributions, Couderc is known for advocating inclusivity in aviation, notably supporting disabled pilots. His extensive involvement and articles in aviation publications further highlight his commitment to the aviation community.

2025 Salute to Excellence Lifetime Achievement Recipient: B. S. Singh Deo

Indian Air Force Wing Commander (ret.) B. S. Singh Deo is recognized with a Lifetime Achievement Award for significantly shaping both military and civilian aviation sectors nationally and internationally. Singh Deo's illustrious career extends over 55 years,

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during which he has flown 19 different aircraft types and been honored with numerous awards, including the Indian Air Force's Vayu Sena Medal for his distinguished service. After retiring from the military, he played a pivotal role in civilian aviation, notably at Bell Helicopter, where he was recognized for his leadership and contributions to aviation safety and training. Singh Deo has also been instrumental in international aviation development, setting up training facilities and conducting safety seminars under the United Nations World Food Programme. He continues to influence the industry as VP of the Rotary Wing Society of India, as a member of the Aeronautical Society of India, and as an educator promoting aviation careers.

These awards will be presented during VERTICON 2025, the world's largest vertical aviation conference and trade show, being held at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center Dallas, Dallas, Texas, Mar. 10–13 (exhibits open Mar. 11–13), 2025. For more information on VERTICON, visit: [VERTICON.org](https://verticalavi.org).

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Vertical Aviation International (VAI), formerly Helicopter Association International (HAI), is the world's leading membership association dedicated to the vertical aviation industry, which encompasses all aircraft capable of vertical flight or short takeoffs and landings. Throughout its 76 years of fueling industry growth through connection, advocacy, safety, education, and support for its members' success, VAI has leveraged the power of vertical flight to strengthen communities worldwide. The association welcomes all members 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 <https://verticalavi.org/>.

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