

News Release



News Release

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Thomas Sando Named 2026 NAFI/King Schools Scholarship Recipient at SUN 'n FUN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE SUN 'n FUN Lakeland, FL April 16, 2026

Thomas M. Sando of Williston North Dakota has been selected as the recipient of the [2026 National Association of Flight Instructors \(NAFI\) & King Schools Scholarship](#).

The scholarship supports a [NAFI](#) member flight instructor seeking to further their professional development and make a meaningful impact on the aviation community. The scholarship provides \$5,000 cash to support a pilot pursuing their initial flight instructor (CFI) certificate, or any add-on rating, along with lifetime access to the entire library of King Schools' training courses and biennial [Flight Instructor Refresher Courses](#) (FIRCS), a total value of over \$20,000.

Sando, who serves as the Aviation and Aerospace Instructor at the [Williston Basin Career and Technical Center in Williston, North Dakota](#), was selected for his demonstrated commitment to teaching, mentorship, and expanding access to aviation education.

In his role, Sando introduces high school students, many from rural communities and first-generation college families to aviation as an attainable and rewarding career path. His program emphasizes not only technical knowledge, but also real-world application, risk management, and mentorship, helping students build confidence and clarity in their aviation goals.

"I truly believe a good pilot never stops learning," said Sando. "This scholarship will help me continue to grow as an instructor and expand opportunities for pilots in my community. As meaningful as the financial support is, the opportunity to learn from John and Martha King is truly invaluable. This will allow me to advance more quickly and reinvest that growth directly into the students I serve."

Sando, already an instrument instructor, will use the scholarship to pursue his Multi-Engine Instructor (MEI) rating, an important step in expanding his instructional capabilities and preparing pilots for more complex aircraft operations. His long-term goal is to continue mentoring both students and fellow instructors while strengthening aviation education pathways in underserved and rural communities.

Karen Kalishek, Chairperson of NAFI says ""Thomas is a natural born educator. In the conversations I have had with him, it becomes obvious that he has a deep passion for improving the lives of his students. He understands the importance of being a positive role model and the

significance of every interaction. Thomas wants to make a positive difference for young, aspiring aviation students. From the NAFI perspective he epitomizes the key attributes of an energetic, inspiring CFI."

"Thomas stood out not only for his accomplishments, but for his clear sense of purpose," said John King, Co-Owner of King Schools. "We were especially impressed by his dedication to reaching students who might not otherwise see a path into aviation, and his belief that teaching is a multiplier—one instructor influencing hundreds of pilots. That mindset reflects exactly what this scholarship is meant to support."

The [NAFI/King Schools Scholarship](#) is awarded annually to a NAFI member flight instructor who demonstrates a strong commitment to aviation education, leadership, and professional growth. Selection criteria include instructional excellence, dedication to the aviation community, and a clear vision for advancing both personal and student success.

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