

Aviation Buffs

A shared passion for aviation has led both a daughter and her dad to enroll at Kent State’s College of Aeronautics and Engineering.

When my daughter, Kent State aeronautics major Camille Copeland, was almost 4 years old, my husband, Air Force veteran Noral Copeland, took her to the 2002 Cleveland National Air Show. They marveled at the vintage airplanes and aerobatics—and, of course, they stayed for the final act, the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds jet demonstration team.

Little did I know that the outing was the beginning of a Labor Day weekend tradition that this daddy/daughter duo from Oakwood Village, Ohio, would share for almost 20 years. And to my delight, they continue to find a meeting of their minds and hearts when it comes to airplanes, airports and all things aviation.

In recent years, my husband and daughter’s passion for aviation has intersected at Kent State’s College of Aeronautics and Engineering, where they are both aeronautics aviation management majors—she a senior and he a sophomore.

In 2018, Noral enrolled as a part-time student in the aeronautics program. Then last year, he retired from a career in meeting and event planning to devote more time to his studies in aviation management.

And I get to witness how proud he is to share the student experience with his daughter. “I love it,” he says. “It gives us something to discuss. I am very proud of my little girl.”

HOOKED ON AVIATION

Noral was 5 years old when he realized how much he loved aviation. “When I was a little boy my mom, dad and I took an airline flight from Kansas City, Missouri, to Memphis, Tennessee,” he remembers. “I have been hooked ever since.”

After high school, his love of aviation drew him like a magnet to the U.S. Air Force, in 1977 after his first stint in college. He served as an air crew member for six years and in the Air National Guard for more than three years.

When he left the Air Force, he went in a different direction with his career. “But my love of aviation had never gone away,” he says. “When Camille showed an interest, that led me back.”



Pictured (left to right): Camille Copeland, Noral Copeland and April McClellan-Copeland

My husband’s enjoyment of aviation began to rub off on me as soon as I met him in 1987. But I never joined my husband and daughter at the air show because they left the house at 7 a.m. (much too early for me) and I didn’t want to devote an entire day to looking at airplanes and stunts. Plus, I thought it was a great time for daddy and daughter to connect without mommy in the mix.

During the years they attended the annual air show together, Camille would tell her dad she wanted to do stunts like the air show performers.

At home, Noral had a flight simulator connected to our computer in the family room, and in her free time Camille frequently sat down and tried her hand at flying. Her transformation to an aviation buff, just like her dad, was well underway.

It continued into high school when her dad took her for a flying lesson at Burke Lakefront Airport. I was scared and had mixed feelings about her taking flight, but I didn’t interfere.

Camille (age 15) at the 2014 Cleveland National Air Show



Then, during her senior year of high school, Camille did a project on aviation and interned with an aviation company based at Burke. Although she started at Kent State with the intention of being a pilot, she later changed her concentration to aviation management—just like her dad.

Now she is working with him on planning Inspire Aviation’s Props and Pistons Festival at the Akron-Fulton Airport, to be held Aug. 19-20, 2023.

The Future of Aviation

There was a time when small passenger air vehicles, or sky taxis, as depicted in the popular 1962 cartoon show *The Jetsons*, were a concept far in the future. However, in 2023 Kent State is taking a leading role in Advanced Air Mobility (AAM), a system of highly automated electric vehicles that transport people or cargo with an emphasis on safety and sustainability.

The College of Aeronautics and Engineering (CAE) is at the forefront of this emerging technology that will integrate autonomous aircraft such as sky taxis and delivery drones into the national airspace and the global economy.

CAE has proposed creating the Center for Advanced Air Mobility, which will foster research, education and collaboration among a multidisciplinary community of faculty, staff and students, as well as partners in government, academia and industry. The proposal, which has gone before the Faculty Senate and the Education Policy Committee, goes before the Board of Trustees on June 28.

“Initially, CAE will be operating the center from the Kent Campus,” says Christina Bloebaum, PhD, dean of the College of Aeronautics and Engineering. “Once we have funding, we will build a dedicated facility at the Kent State University Airport, where companies can test their technology, their designs and capabilities in flight.”

Already, areas at the airport are approved by the Federal Aviation Administration for flying this type of aircraft, she says. The FAA is working with universities and companies to develop policies for the aircraft.

“This is just formalizing what we already have here, which is incredibly extensive,” Bloebaum says. The college can draw on faculty expertise, related curriculum and an entire fleet of drones and aircraft, she says. The funding will initially come from CAE, with money generated from grants, fee for service, possible partnerships, events and other future sources.

Noral is logistics coordinator for the airshow and Camille will work as the airside coordinator, a liaison to exhibitors and emergency crews.

“Working on the air show together feels great because it’s like a full-circle moment,” she says. He agrees. “And I’m looking forward to being a proud dad on my daughter’s graduation.”

You can bet I’ll be joining them for that event.

— April McClellan-Copeland



Electric passenger drone

LEADING THE WAY ON AAM

Bloebaum was on the steering committee that developed the state’s AAM strategy, and she is the regional academic representative on the Jobs Ohio advisory committee, as the state leads the way in AAM development.

On May 2, Kent State hosted a conference, “Reaching New Heights in Advanced Air Mobility,” in partnership with Manufacturing Works, Team NEO, NEOFIX (Northeast Ohio Flight Information Exchange) and the Smart Manufacturing Cluster of Northeast Ohio. The full-day event featured plenary sessions and breakouts with an emphasis on supply chain opportunities. The day before, conference attendees were invited to view live drone demonstrations at Kent State’s airport.

Soon, CAE students will have the tools to meet the new demands that sky taxis and delivery drones will place on the national airspace.

Two of the five new Bachelor of Science degree programs recently approved by Kent State’s Board of Trustees are related to this emerging sector. Air Traffic and Airspace Management (one of the first degree programs of its kind in the country) and Unmanned Aircraft Systems Flight Operations will teach students the skills needed to manage an airspace filled with drones, flying taxis, personal aircraft and large commercial aircraft.

“This is being defined as the democratization of aviation because it becomes much more affordable for people to access aviation,” Bloebaum says. “They do not have to buy an airplane. There are now other alternatives.”

—April McClellan-Copeland