

Learning to Fly

LIFTING UP TEENAGERS STRUGGLING WITH GRIEF



Ret. Col. Jack Howell explains a Piper Cheyenne's instrument panel to Teens-In-Flight students Anastasia Pagello, at the controls, and Bonita Davis.

Mentor Profile

Thomas Edison State College Mentor Jack Howell knew about the pain and grief experienced by the families of fallen U.S. service members all too well, so he did something about it.

Howell, a retired colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps, founded Teens-In-Flight, a nonprofit foundation that provides flight training and aviation maintenance scholarships to teens who have lost a parent in the global war on terrorism or whose parents were wounded in action and are disabled. He formed the foundation after serving as a casualty assistance officer from time to time throughout his military career.

Casualty assistance officers are responsible for informing the families of service members who are severely injured or killed in the line of duty and assisting them with the administrative work surrounding the tragedy.

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“When the administrative side of informing a military family of their loss is completed, the family is left with their grief,” said Howell, who mentors criminal justice/terrorism courses at Thomas Edison State College. “These events can have a crushing effect on teenage family members, who often suffer

(from left) Ret. Col. Jack Howell performs a preflight check with Teens-In-Flight students Bonita Davis and Anastasia Pagello.



Pictured is Ret. Col. Jack Howell, (left), Teens-In-Flight president with students Juan Rodriguez and Gloria King with their congressional nomination to the U.S. Air Force Academy.

from post traumatic stress disorder and become withdrawn and distrustful and exhibit negative behavior.”

Howell established the Teens-In-Flight foundation in 2004 to help teenage children struggling with loss and grief by providing an opportunity for free flight lessons with the goal of earning a private pilot license. The value of the instruction is estimated at \$9,000 per student.

“In many cases, post traumatic stress disorder is overlooked in teens dealing with the loss of a parent who was killed or seriously injured in action,” said Howell, who donates monetary compensation he receives from mentoring at Thomas Edison State College to the program. “We believe that providing a positive and fun experience helps teens heal and diminishes some of their grief.”

(from left) Ret. Col. Jack Howell tests aviation fuel with Teens-In-Flight students Bonita Davis, Anastasia Pagello and Ivan Ramos.



Ret. Col. Jack Howell explains the importance of weight and balance to aircraft performance to Teens-in-Flight students (from left) Ivan Ramos, Bonita Davis and Anastasia Pagello.



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Teens-In-Flight currently has established programs located in Jacksonville and Palm Coast, Fla.; Fort Carson, Colo.; and Fort Hood, Texas. Howell said the foundation hopes to expand the program nationwide. Teens-In-Flight also helps teens that are considered at-risk or under privileged.

Students also learn that Howell is an eternal optimist.

“I don't believe in the word 'no,’” he said. “Several years ago, while on active duty in the Marine Corps, I removed all negative words from my personal dictionary. Bottom line, don't give me a thousand excuses why it can't be done, give me the reason it will be done.”

And while “doing” is a philosophy that permeates Howell's being; it is obvious that educating is how he facilitates it.

More than 30 teens are currently participating in the program. Since its inception, more than 90 teenagers have completed the program, including Victoria Emerson, a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

“I didn't realize all of the benefits until I fully got into the program. There are so many career opportunities that open up,” she said. “When I applied to West Point, Teens-In-Flight was the one of the first things I put on my list and I think it had an impact on my admittance.”

Both Howell's military career and his work as a high school and college educator give him a unique perspective as a mentor at Thomas Edison State College, where he works with adult learners.

“Mentoring at Thomas Edison State College has been a wonderful experience for me. The students have shown great intellectual curiosity and determination,” said Howell. “I enjoy the online format because I think it is important that emphasis be placed on the freedom it gives a student.”

Howell earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Monmouth College in West Long Branch, N.J.; a Master of Arts degree from Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif.; a PhD from Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; and attended the Naval War College.

Originally from Lakewood, N.J., Howell now resides in Palm Coast, Fla., with his wife, Samantha, who is a co-director at Teens-In-Flight. To learn more about the foundation, visit: www.teens-in-flight.com.

Jack Howell