

# COMMUNITY NEWS

## Learning to fly



Chris Miller, a Hazelwood Central High School graduate and Boeing engineer stands in the Prologue Room at Boeing.

Photo by Kate Edmonson

*Boeing engineer brings mobile flight simulator to schools to give area children a chance to take the controls and learn what it takes to become a pilot*

**By Charlotte Beard**

Some youth may never get the experience of flying on a commercial airplane until they are into their adult years. However, there is at least one Flight Simulations Lab Manager who has created a unique aviation experience which he transports to various schools.

For approximately five years, Chris Miller, a Hazelwood Central High School graduate and alumnus of Tuskegee University, has driven his flight simulator to various schools in the St. Louis area and guided them through takeoffs and landings. Miller who leads a team of software engineers

in his role at the Boeing Corporation, built his mobile simulator to incorporate four computers and flight controls similar to a Cessna 172 (a four-seat, single-engine, high wing, fixed-wing aircraft). The simulator is housed in the back of a trailer.

"I was inspired by my dad; he was involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters," Miller stated of his motivation to engage youth. "Growing up (I saw) he always had a 'little brother' through that organization. Just seeing him give back to the community, I knew it was something that I also wanted to do. In college I would read (to students) at

a local elementary school in Tuskegee, (Alabama). But then when I graduated college, being in St. Louis I started going to elementary schools and doing more reading and talking to students. But it wasn't hands-on. I was speaking with the superintendent of one district; he had a program where he took students down to Parks College (of St. Louis University's) aviation program. But it was costly to keep taking students from the district down there to see aerospace things, to see flight simulators."

See 'FLY' page 3

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## 'FLY' from cover

Miller shared that based on that conversation with the superintendent and the idea that he wanted to undertake something he felt made his involvement "hands-on," he was motivated to build a simulator that he could take around to schools and community events. He shared that he believed it would, "satisfy the need of taking technology across the region but in particularly to underserved communities because they may not have as much budget for technology in the classroom."

The simulator visits are scheduled around Miller's commitments to Boeing and its MQ-25 program. Requests for school visits are made on his website ([www.chrisryanmiller.com](http://www.chrisryanmiller.com)).

Miller shared that some of the students he first met during his school visits have now graduated from high school and some have gone on to study engineering.

"Just knowing that you had a little bit to do with that (success) is rewarding."

He has also witnessed the excitement of other students in wanting to pursue aviation more. Unlike what Miller experienced in his youth, he discovered that some of the students had never flown on a commercial airplane.

"My dad worked at St. Louis Airport. I can remember going to the airport out on the ramp with him. He had a position that allowed us to go out on the ramp and be around the aircraft. Also, there used to be a viewing point on Lindbergh Blvd. where you could watch airplanes take off and land. Many people who work for the airlines are aware of the benefits you get related to travel. We were always able to travel throughout my youth growing up. Just being around airplanes, whether traveling or seeing them in my dad's work environment, inspired me to want to know more about them."

In addition to the flight simulator, Sarah Reed who heads Communications and Branding for Boeing's Government Operations shared that Miller helped develop the Boeing-inspired design challenge "Design to Fly," a hands-on project that teaches students about flight control systems. Miller shared that the design challenge has not yet been launched.

"Students will build an instrument to learn how to fly and control an airplane," stated Miller. "When you have the instrument panel that you build with this challenge and then link it with software, students can essentially do everything (as I can) in the simulator I have. But you're building some of the controls that control the speed and left and right motion of the airplane. It's a cool challenge. I was definitely a little biased when I was helping to design it. I thought kids being able to build something to learn how to fly an airplane would be pretty exciting."

Reed states that the simulator for the challenge was also shared with pilots at the United States Air Force's "Eyes Above the Horizon," an outreach event to expose students to STEM and aerospace careers.

Reed also shared that Miller was awarded a 2019 Chairman's Award at this year's Boeing Leadership Meeting for his dedication to getting students interested in STEM. The award presented by Chairman, President and CEO Dennis Muilenburg, enabled Miller to select the Legacy Flight Academy as the recipient of a \$10,000 grant from Boeing. The academy is located on the campus of Tuskegee Airmen, at Moton Field in Alabama and is geared towards students ages 16-19.

Miller stated, "They talk a lot about the Tuskegee Airmen and (due to) me being a Tuskegee grad that really hit home for me. Their community outreach doesn't span one city; they go to various cities. They take students up on discovery flights.



Chris Miller sits with students inside the mobile flight simulator he designed.

Submitted photo

Not only do the students get to talk to pilots and learn about the Tuskegee Airmen, but they also have an opportunity to go up on a plane ride for the very first time."

Miller expressed that he hopes his involvement with students will encourage them to not shy away from careers that involve math and science and recognize that we are surrounded by these two disciplines.

"I wasn't the best in math, but I applied it to airplanes which is something I really wanted to learn about, so the math came easy. If you apply math and science to something you enjoy, or something you use every day, learning it will be pretty easy to get through because you are looking at the end goal. For me it was wanting to learn how planes fly, so I knew there had to be some math and science behind it. Anyone can get into any field with the right amount of work. The fields that they think are challenging they can do."

The Aerospace Science Engineering graduate went on to share his advice for youth while they are still in school.

"I look at the internet - I think if I was growing up right now," stated Miller, "I would say that the information is out there. If there is something they think they might be interested in, they can utilize the breadth of the information out on the internet to go out there and start learning and really get ahead of the curve. Right now, you can learn everything you need to learn to write software (programs) without going to get a four-year degree. So, I would highly encourage young people who have an inkling of what they want to do to utilize the internet. It's not just for YouTube and doing things for entertainment value. It can really be a great tool to educate themselves right now and be ahead of the curve as they look towards college, as they look towards a degree. You can go to some firms without a four-year degree if you fully understand how to write software."

Miller has also written two children's books - "Daddy, How Do Planes Fly?" and "Daddy, How Do We Get to the Moon?" For more information visit: [www.chrisryanmiller.com](http://www.chrisryanmiller.com).

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## Missouri Minority Coaches Association aiming to bring all coaches together no matter the race



"A football is brown but you know when the football is being used in the field of play, it doesn't whether a black kid is carrying the ball or a white kid is carrying the ball," Festus head coach Russ Schmidt said.

ST. LOUIS – One great thing about the game of football is its ability to bring all kids together no matter their race. "A football is brown, but you know when the football is being used in the field of play, it doesn't whether a black kid is carrying the ball or a white kid is carrying the ball," Festus head coach Russ Schmidt said. "There's other people besides the white community that is involved in coaching and mentoring players," Schmidt said. A year ago, Roosevelt head coach, Trey Porter, was eager to help the minority coaches and have the backs of his student-athletes. So, he and a few others came up with the Missouri Minority Coaches Association. Porter admits when it first started, they nearly hit a wall.

Schmidt is a coach who has seen the best of both worlds. Prior to his stint in Festus, he spent a majority of his coaching career at Hillsboro before spending one year as a teacher in the [Hazelwood School District](#). It was there where he learned a valuable life lesson. "There's other people besides the white community that is involved in coaching and mentoring players," Schmidt said.

A year ago, Roosevelt head coach, Trey Porter, was eager to help the minority coaches and have the backs of his student-athletes. So, he and a few others came up with the Missouri Minority Coaches Association. Porter admits when it first started, they nearly hit a wall.

"When people see the word minority, they're running away or turning the other cheek thinking it's for black guys only," Porter said. "It's a 100 percent inclusive, everybody is welcome," he said.

St. Mary's head coach Corey Bethany said not only does this association teach coaches who aren't minorities how to interact with a minority player, but it also helps the kids score what they're looking for in the long run. "All the college coaches can't get around to all the high schools so having an association and talking amongst each other helps get those kids to those places," Bethany said.

It's an association that is just beginning, but it's one that serves a purpose. Uniting all while helping our future stars. "We need Caucasian coaches, we need Hispanic coaches, we need all the coaches to come together," Porter said. "I believe it's our job to make sure we're taking care of those kids just like we are with the other side and getting the things they need in order to place themselves in a position to be successful not just in school but in life," Schmidt said. To hear more from these coaches and how you can learn to interact with kids who come from different backgrounds, you can go to the Missouri Minority Coaches Association coaching clinic at the Lumiere Place Casino March 1 at 4 p.m. and March 2 at 9 a.m.

<https://www.ksdk.com/article/sports/missouri-minority-coaches-association-aiming-to-bring-all-coaches-together-no-matter-the-race/63-6a584387-8c0b-43c2-9631-9c97a805d2e3>