



KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, INTEGRITY – TECHS TO FOLLOW AT THE COMPETITION

BY KATIE ROBERTSON

TEAMS FROM AROUND THE WORLD WILL BE ARRIVING NEXT MONTH IN CHICAGO FOR THE PREMIER EVENT IN AVIATION MAINTENANCE. THE COMPETITION PRESENTED BY SNAP-ON (WWW.AEROSPACECOMPETITION.COM) RUNS IN COOPERATION WITH MRO AMERICAS OFFERS A ONE-OF-A-KIND OPPORTUNITY FOR AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE TECHNICIANS TO SHOWCASE THEIR SKILLS AND COMPETE FOR PRIZES, INCLUDING THE WILLIAM F. “BILL” O’BRIEN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE.

The Competition kicks off April 9 at the MRO Americas convention at McCormick Place in Chicago. This year’s field includes 90 maintenance teams from around the world competing in six divisions: Commercial Aviation, General Aviation, Space, Military, MRO/OEM and School, which attracts teams from the country’s top A&P schools. Events include a wide range of skills that technicians face every day on the job, including airframe damage inspection, composite repair, engine fan blade removal, fuel tank entry precautions, and others. Each event has a 15-minute time limit, resulting in exciting, fast-paced action and great drama for spectators to watch.

While only one team will walk away with the 5-foot-tall O’Brien Award trophy, all of them will be elevated by the incredible platform this event provides for some much-deserved recognition. In addition to the critical work they do to ensure aircraft operate safely, many individual technicians take The Competition’s core values of knowledge, skills and integrity to the next level.



ZACH THORNHILL – KNOWLEDGE

“Lazy” is not a word in Zach Thornhill’s vocabulary. This talented technician has had a varied and accomplished career, serving in the Air Force, leading teams of technicians in commercial applications and now serving



as the avionics lead for his current employer. Following the encouragement of his wife 18 months ago, Thornhill enrolled at WSU Tech in Wichita, Kansas, to pursue his A&P license. Despite the challenges of working full-time during the day and attending classes at night, Thornhill is determined to earn his license.

“An A&P certification opens a lot of doors for me,” he says. “I’m always looking for the next thing and asking how I can advance my career, how I can advance my family and where new opportunities can take me.”

Given his background, Thornhill could have opted for a shorter program or tested out of certain requirements on the way to his license, but he saw the process as a chance to learn instead of just an achievement to check off his list.

“I decided to do the full program because of the valuable information I can learn in the classroom,” he said. “I could easily go to my job and get signed off on certain tasks that I work on and know, but in my A&P program it’s all about the principles and developing skills that will translate wherever I go. There are other easier paths that I could have taken, but this way will set me up the best for my future.”

Thornhill’s hard work is about to pay off. In early March of this year, he will graduate with an A&P certificate in hand, and he will be representing WSU Tech as team captain during The Competition where he hopes to put his name out there and open up even more doors for his bright future.

TECHNICAL SGT. TREVOR MORROW – SKILLS

Aviation maintenance runs in Trevor Morrow’s blood. Technical Sgt. Morrow is a third-generation military veteran and second-generation Air Force Airman serving at RAF Mildenhall in the United Kingdom. He was drawn



to the military and aircraft maintenance at an early age, in part by his stepfather, who worked as a technician in both the Navy and the Air Force.

For the past 12 years, Morrow held a variety of Air Force jobs. He worked maintenance on the KC-10, C-17s and C-5s then pivoted to being a flying crew chief on the KC-135. Now, he’s in the back shop, working on equipment and electrical systems in his role as section chief.

Throughout his time in the military, Morrow has found fulfillment in putting his skills to the test.

“It’s very rewarding to do this work, regardless of where the plane ends up, which people can have a hard time wrapping their head around,” he said. “Sometimes I can spend 12 hours fixing a plane and getting it working, only for it to not make a mission. But, in that situation, I solved the problem. We can move forward, and that’s the reward.”

Morrow might not be in it for glory, but glory found him anyway. He was recently the recipient of the coveted Lt. Gen. Leo Marquez Award, which is presented annually to a maintainer who has demonstrated superior service, performance, job knowledge and results.

Once again, as he prepares to represent his base as part of the 100 MXG team at The Competition, Morrow is not concerned about earning recognition for his talents. Instead, he looks forward to seeing the new technology and equipment on the civilian side of the industry and bringing what he learns back to his work to help him further develop his skills.

CRYSTALLE LAAMANEN – INTEGRITY

Crystalle Laamanen's impact on the aviation industry goes well beyond her work maintaining helicopters in Yellowknife, NWT Canada. She has also built an impressive legacy for herself by teaching and supporting the next generation of aviation technicians.

Over her 25-year career, Laamanen has consistently prioritized being a leader and mentor for young professionals. She started in Yellowknife working on helicopters and eventually also teaching in the local aviation program for basic maintenance training. In this time, she developed an Approved Training Organization (ATO) program that helps Canadian technicians maintain their certification.

A new job opportunity took her across Canada to teach at a community college in Nova Scotia. After a few years, however, she missed the hands-on work, and started flying back to Yellowknife in the summers to resume her maintenance career.

She may not be in a formal teaching role while she's working as part of Great Slave Helicopters maintenance team in Yellowknife, but her job still allows her to work with younger people during the hiring and training process.

"I love teaching future AMEs, and then I get to hire them and work alongside them," she says. "I work with many of my former students in Yellowknife, and I get to see them continue to develop and grow."

Laamanen is currently on leave from the college, working full-time in Yellowknife, but her mentoring work has only grown. She now serves as the Atlantic regional ambassador for Elevate Aviation, a Canadian-based organization dedicated to providing resources for women in aviation careers. In her role, she works to build relationships in the aviation community, supporting a team working to pair mentors with mentees and raise awareness for the opportunities available for women. One way she hopes to do that is by competing on the Elevate team at this year's Competition.



"Everyone knows about the shortages we have in the industry," she says. "Events like these are a great opportunity to get the word out there and ignite that passion for aviation maintenance in young people."

In addition to advocating for women in the industry, Laamanen is excited to step into the student role at the event and learn from the competitors and exhibitors at the event.

These three professionals and all the other remarkable technicians across 90 competing teams will be put to the test in just a few short weeks. MRO Americas attendees are encouraged to stop by and cheer them on, as their show credentials include admission to The Competition. ■



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