

# Female pilots break barriers in aviation, look to empower the next generation

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In 1973, American Airlines hired the first female pilot, Bonnie Tiburzi Caputo — the first woman to fly for a major U.S. carrier. In 1992, American hired Brenda Robinson, the first female African-American pilot for the U.S. Navy and the airline. These women are trailblazers. More importantly they paved the way for others.

Clockwise from top, First Officer Stacey Banks, LAX; PSA First Officer Dianna Lugenway; Envoy Check Airman Tammy Binns; Brenda Robinson; First Officer Beth Powell, MIA; and First Officer Minka Tang, ORD.

Captain Janice Anderson has flown for American for 28 years.

First Officer Mika Tang and First Officer Beth Powell mentor other women and female pilots.

That tradition of setting your own course, while inspiring those around you, continues with female pilots at American. While our pilots joined the airline from locations around the world, the sisterhood and comradery of these female aviators isn't the only thing they have in common; they all share the same drive and passion for empowering other women and inspiring the next generation.

"When I was little, I would see my aunt who was a flight attendant. She always looked so happy and always had stories to tell about the places she had been," said First Officer Mika Tang, who is based at ORD. Mika said it was important to her to not only make something of herself, but to share that same smile of her aunt while doing it. Mika taught a high school aviation history course while she earned her pilot's license. In 2004, she received her commercial pilot's license and flew for Mesa Airlines before joining American as a Boeing 737 first officer in 2015.

As an African-American woman, Mika wants other young women to know the possibilities are endless for women in

any industry. "I admire a lot of women — historic figures like Audrey Lorde and Susan B. Anthony, and those who broke barriers in aviation like Willa Brown, the first African-American woman to earn her pilot's license in the United States," said Mika. "All of these women have shown that gender is not a barrier." Aside from volunteering with homeless outreach organizations, Mika has started creating a scholarship aimed at helping young women who dream of aviation careers but may have financial hardships.

The passion for outreach is a common endeavor among these women. MIA-based First Officer Bethoyia Powell recalls growing up in Jamaica and being sent away to Kingston by her mother for a better education. Not only did she complete high school at the age of 16, but by the age of 21 she had received a private pilot's license, a commercial pilot's license and was hired by American Eagle. She went on to join American in 2014 as a first officer on the B737. And while most young women would be proud of this accomplishment, it was a bittersweet moment for Beth because her biggest supporter, her mother, was battling pancreatic cancer.

"When I interviewed with American and accepted the job, I fulfilled my dream as well as my mom's dream," said Beth. Three years after she joined American, Beth started her healing and grieving process by creating a scholarship in honor of her late mother, Beverly Powell, as well as fellow American pilot and mentor, Jackie Alberga. She tells kids today to, "Know what you want at a young age. You will discover this based on the activities and subjects that you are passionate about. Dream big and dream loud then set your goal. Your passion will propel you through your journey. And in the end, you will never feel you worked a day in your life because you are doing what you absolutely love."

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Just as they have been mentored in their careers, Mika and Beth continue to mentor other women and build strong relationships with female pilots. Fellow ORD-based Capt. Janice Anderson described it best, "When you see another female pilot, whether she's a captain or first officer, there is always a bond. We understand what it took for each of us to get here. It doesn't have to always be a hello but a simple head nod is an unspoken understanding of respect for one another to be in our positions."

In her 28 years with American and additional time at Northwest Airlines, Janice has seen the growth of women who fly commercial evolve. With a little more than 4,000 female pilots in commercial aviation, Janice appreciates the increased number of women taking on the profession as she mentors through organizations like Women in Aviation, National Gay Pilots Association and Organization of Black Pilots. She is determined to make sure the girl power among women with wings remains by instilling how rewarding the pilot profession is and inspiring young

women to fly.