American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Jet fuel in their veins

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A love of all things aviation runs deep in the Ellis household. Nora, a Chicago O'Hare (ORD)-based Boeing 787 First Officer, has been flying for American for 27 years. Her father was a distinguished Air Force aviator. Her husband, Dave, is an aeronautical engineer. And their son, Sam, recently received his private pilot's license.

All Sam wants to do is follow in his mom's pilot footsteps and become a pilot for American. The American Airlines Education Foundation is helping him get one step closer.

Nora Ellis on her son's orientation flight in 2017.

Sam, along with 359 other college students, received a total of $975,000 in scholarships at last month's Education Foundation celebration. Each recipient received a $2,500 scholarship, and 44 first-generation college students each received an additional $1,000. This fall, the students will be studying at 230 universities in nine countries, 41 states and Washington, D.C.

"When Sam called to share the awesome news, I was just thrilled. It feels so amazing to see all of his hard work pay off, and I'm so grateful for American supporting my son's dreams," Nora said.

Nora started her aviation career at the United States Air Force Academy. While on active duty, she flew the T-37 trainer and C-141 transport aircraft, taught dozens of new officers how to fly and transported people and equipment around the world. Nora joined American while serving in the U.S. Air Force Reserve before eventually retiring from the Air Force in 2005.

Nora Ellis and her son Sam at this year's Education Foundation Scholarship Reception.

With an incredible aviation pedigree, it seemed only natural that Sam would follow in his parents' footsteps, but it

wasn't until two years ago when Nora gifted Sam an orientation flight for his 16th birthday that he was certain. "From that point forward, I was hooked on aviation, and was determined to earn my private pilot's license," Sam remembered.

After Sam's junior year of high school, he made flight school his top priority. He researched the best flight schools in the area, and determined that North Star Aviation in Mankato, Minnesota, was the right choice.

Sam made good use of his three-hour roundtrip commutes by listening to audio study sets that would help him master the knowledge needed to earn his license. This August, thanks in part to the Education Foundation scholarship, he's headed to Minnesota State University-Mankato as a Professional Flight Aviation major and will continue his flight lessons, and his journey to becoming a pilot, at North Star Aviation.

"The scholarship ceremony was incredible. I was so humbled to meet the other recipients, and by the end of the night I really felt like I was part of the American family," said Sam. "I can't wait to continue flight school and peruse my degree this fall, and all of that is easier thanks to the Education Foundation."