

NEWS RELEASE

## The first of many: Women in Tech Ops

3/17/2022

Every year, aircraft maintenance crews from around the United States test their skills and knowledge during the Aerospace Maintenance Competition (AMC). The event, which recognizes and celebrates aviation maintenance technicians (AMTs), puts the aviation industry and the AMT profession on a national stage. What's different this year? American's first-ever all-female team will be competing for the first time.

AMTs Elena Gonzalez, Meylin Concepcion, Pari Soneji, Allison Codd, Malinda Hamm and Regina Patronie are coming together from across the country to represent American's first all-female AMT team, named Women in Tech Ops. AMT and team lead Elena Gonzalez, who is based at Miami International Airport, reflects on what inspired her to compile an all-women team this year.

"A few years back when I went to the AMC as a member of the Association for Women in Aviation Maintenance, it was so amazing to see everyone competing, but the first thing that came to mind was why aren't there any women teams representing American?" Elena said. "Everyone deserves a chance to put their best foot forward, and by doing this, there may be other women who feel inspired to get involved."

The team is looking to make a change, not only in a historically male-dominated competition, but the profession as a whole. Allison Codd, who has been with American since 2018 and is based at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport, always knew she wanted to pursue a hands-on career and was surprised to find a path in aviation that let her do just that. Now, she hopes to spread awareness about this field to other women.

"Sometimes some of the more technical careers within aviation are not explored enough by women." Allison says. "It's not always about the muscles and heavy lifting — there's more to the job than that and women should know this is a career that is open to them."

And while there's been an increase in women joining the aircraft maintenance field, the path for women breaking into the world of mechanics hasn't come without its own set of challenges. "To be quite honest, as a female in this field, sometimes it feels like we have to work 20 times harder," said Meylin, an AMT based at Philadelphia International Airport. "I'm in a man's world, so I have to make sure that I'm representing at all times."

But even with the added pressures of measuring up to their male counterparts, the rewards are always worth it.

The Women in Tech Ops team accompanied by a student from Tarrant County College during their practice session this month at the Tulsa Base Maintenance facility.

"Personally, I feel like I've always had to prove myself working with mostly men. I want to show them that I can do the same job, and I don't need help doing it," added Malinda, an AMT located at American's Base Maintenance facility in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "As the years have gone by, more women have entered the field and that's fantastic. I'm glad there's an avenue for them to go to, because this is a good job, it really is. I feel blessed to be in this position."

Pari Soneji worked as an aeronautical engineer in India, but when she migrated to the States, she attended Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology and to her surprise, felt inclined to leave the desk job for a more hands-on role. Now, she has a positive take on what her profession allows her to do and the possibilities it can provide others looking for a meaningful career full of opportunity.

"I'm happy being an AMT because I actually get to be around the aircraft I studied and learn about the systems more hands-on," said Pari, who works at John F. Kennedy International Airport. "Yes, you have to prove yourself at times, but don't let that discourage you. There are so many people who will be there to support and encourage you. You have to work hard, yes, but we as women can do whatever we set our minds to."

To women considering a career in aviation maintenance, Elena said: "Keep your options and mind open — don't limit yourself. You don't know what you're capable of until you try, so have that confidence within yourself to push forward so that you can open doors for yourself."

When asked what they are looking forward to the most at the competition, everyone on the team agreed it was getting to meet other female mechanics from around the country. Regina Patronie, who started her AMT career with US Airways in 1999 and is based at Pittsburgh International Airport, shared how the industry has changed throughout the years and why seeing more women in the field is so special to her.

"I have been doing this for many, many years, and back then, there were not very many of us women in this field at all," she said. "There are a lot more women in aviation now and I think it is absolutely wonderful that women now have a voice in this field."

The team has been busy practicing and excitedly await competition day, where they will represent American Airlines AMTs from around the world.

"We're very excited about showcasing this team for American and showing what we can bring to the table," said Elena. "We are a diverse team in both cultures and skillsets. We bring different personalities to the table that allow us to learn from one another and grow both as individuals and as a team."

And while this is the first time an all-female team will compete for American, it certainly won't be the last.

"Getting to know these women and seeing how they communicate and work together has been really inspiring to see," Elena added. "I believe this will be the first of many all-female teams that compete in the years to come."