



NEWS RELEASE

American Airlines announces third round of Elise Eberwein Cadet Academy Pilot Scholarship recipients

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Lubava Zhdanovich and Sarah Smith — two flight attendants based at LaGuardia Airport (LGA) — were selected out of thousands of applicants to pursue their dreams of flight.

FORT WORTH, Texas — American Airlines announced today its third round of recipients for the prestigious Elise Eberwein Cadet Academy Pilot Scholarship: Sarah Smith and Lubava Zhdanovich. Both American Airlines flight attendants based out of LaGuardia Airport (LGA), Smith and Zhdanovich will each receive \$50,000 toward flight training.

The Elise Eberwein Cadet Academy Pilot Scholarship is a million-dollar, decade-long initiative that empowers American Airlines team members to advance their goals of becoming pilots through the American Airlines Cadet Academy (AACAA).

The scholarship honors the legacy of former American Executive Vice President of People and Global Engagement, Elise Eberwein, known for championing career growth and development during her time at the airline before she retired in 2022 following 35 years of service.

Candidates must go through a rigorous application process, including a written application and multiple letters of recommendation, culminating in an all-day, in-person panel interview with current American pilots and senior leadership.

“I couldn’t be prouder of Sarah and Lubava, two candidates who are incredibly well-positioned for flight school,” said Eberwein. “They show strong qualities of perseverance, tenacity and passion — all skills necessary to succeed



in the Cadet Academy's training and, ultimately, as an American Airlines pilot."

MEET THE RECIPIENTS

Sarah Smith
Flight Attendant, LGA

Sarah Smith

Smith's interest in aviation began at a young age, watching planes pass by from the flight school at Bowling Green University. She joined American in 2020 as a flight attendant, although her dream was always to become a pilot.

Determined to keep that dream moving forward, Smith enrolled in flight training on her own — training 20 hours a week for her private pilot license — while still working up to 70 hours a month as a flight attendant. She was forced to pause her training multiple times due to financial constraints but didn't let that stop her dream of becoming an American pilot. "One way or another ... they're going to hire me," she said. Smith began picking up work on the side at her flight school — everything from cleaning the aircraft to working in the hangar — to fund her lessons and continue her dream.

In October 2025, that dream became a reality. Smith received her private pilot license from Buckeye Flight Academy in Toledo, Ohio, all while remaining involved in her local community: volunteering with the all-Ohio chapter of the Ninety-Nines, an international organization of women pilots, and continuing to run her nonprofit, Look Good Feel Good, which provides haircuts to individuals experiencing homelessness in the Toledo community.

Smith is enrolled in flight training at ATP Flight School in Concord, North Carolina. "I will not forget where I came from and will do everything in my power to make this community more inclusive and accessible to those who do not have access to funds or support."

Lubava Zhdanovich
Flight Attendant, LGA

Lubava Zhdanovich

Originally from Russia, Zhdanovich first stepped onto an airplane at age 16. She worked as an intern for security at the Moscow airport, familiarizing herself with all the different aspects of aviation. "I didn't know what the path looked like," she said, "I knew I wanted to do something in the aviation space ... but I didn't realize women could be pilots until I moved to the U.S."

At 18 years old, Zhdanovich moved to the U.S. by herself and with little to no English. She was driven by a lifelong

dream of becoming an airline pilot thanks to inspiration from her grandfather.

Zhdanovich worked various jobs in the service industry to improve her English skills, which, she believes, simultaneously helped her to uncover “a love for caring for people.” She joined American as a flight attendant in 2022 and admits that during her training she told her colleagues, “I will be a pilot one day.”

She flew her first flight in 2023, and in early summer 2025, officially began her flight training, using funds saved from her time as a flight attendant.

Zhdanovich, now a member of Women in Aviation International, will report to Infinity Flight Group in Fort Pierce, Florida, in the coming weeks. She describes the opportunity as “life-changing.”

The Elise Eberwein Cadet Academy Pilot Scholarship is a testament to American’s commitment to grow the next generation of exceptional aviators. Applications for the next round of scholarship recipients will be announced in late 2026.

To learn more about the American Airlines Cadet Academy, please visit the **AACA website**.

About American Airlines Group (NASDAQ: AAL)

American Airlines is a premium global airline connecting more of the U.S. to the world. With roots tracing back to an air mail carrier in the Midwestern United States in 1926, American now operates more than 6,000 daily flights to more than 350 destinations in more than 60 countries and serves more than 200 million customers annually. Powered by a proud and talented team of 130,000 aviation professionals, American’s team lives out the airline’s purpose of caring for people on life’s journey every day.

The world’s largest airline proudly celebrates its centennial year in 2026, reaching a milestone that reflects a century of innovation and the Forever ForwardSM spirit that changed the industry and the world. American introduced the first scheduled air cargo service, the first airport lounge and the first airline loyalty program and continues to reinvent the customer experience today. The airline is also a founding member of the oneworld alliance, whose members serve more than 900 destinations around the globe.

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