

Outlook

2024

Education and Careers



CHRIS DORST | HD Media photos

Flight instructor Tyler Warner and Marshall University aviation student Hunter Ellison (right) prepare to go on a flying lesson on Feb. 21 at the Bill Noe Flight School at West Virginia International Yeager Airport, in Charleston.

Taking flight

West Virginia's aviation programs see growth, provide many opportunities

By **KATELYN ALUISE**
kalui@hdmallc.com

SINCE OPENING in 2021, the Bill Noe Flight School at Marshall University has seen rapid growth, going from just 20 students to 118 and from one aircraft to seven in almost three years, according to Chief of Aviation Operations Nancy Ritter.

Similarly, Joel Kirk, chief pilot and director of Fairmont State University's Aviation Center of Excellence, said his program saw such a significant growth in interest since opening in 2017 that the school actually had to cut back on the program's acceptance rate and become more selective.

"When I started the program from 200 to 300 hours a year, we're now flying 5,000 hours a

year. And we have a 60-student capacity, and we're full all the time," Kirk said.

Kirk said the growing demand for these two programs precedes their creation.

"I think the interest has always been there. I think the capacity has not," Kirk said.

From flight path to career path

Kirk said that many people living in rural areas of West Virginia may not have known that aviation could be a potential path for them or that there are plenty of jobs already available in the field they could train for. He said his program and similar ones that have appeared across the state are bringing these opportunities closer to home.

SEE **FLIGHT, 2E**



A student and instructor use a flight simulator inside the Bill Noe Flight School at West Virginia International Yeager Airport.



LEFT: Nancy Ritter, director and chief instructor of Marshall University's Bill Noe Flight School, is shown at the school's headquarters on Feb. 21, at Yeager airport.

BELOW: One of the seven airplanes is shown at Marshall University's Bill Noe Flight School.

