



The Forum for Advancing Vertical Flight

By Mike Hirschberg, VFS Director 2011-2023

The Vertical Flight Society is now celebrating 80 years since it was founded on Feb. 25, 1943. It has been an incredible honor serving as the sixth VFS Executive Director, and it's been extraordinarily rewarding to be a VFS member for the past 27 years — since Forum 52 — one-third of the existence of the Society.

During this time, I've had the pleasure of meeting some of the helicopter and vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) aircraft pioneers, and other giants in industry, government and academia from around the world who made important contributions to advancing the future of vertical flight. I have also been so inspired by students, startups and other innovators with their novel ideas and new ways of thinking. This exposure through VFS — most brilliantly on display at our Annual Forum — creates a virtuous cycle by melding the wisdom of experience with innovative ideas from fresh perspectives.

The Forum brings together members from across experience levels, with the diversity of disciplines and backgrounds, and the synergy of industry, academia and government. It is the only event in the world that brings together students and CEOs, researchers and military operators, exhibitors and innovators, all striving to advance vertical flight — helicopters, advanced rotorcraft, drones and electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft — through improved understanding of vertical flight and the inspiration to continue striving for improvement.

This year's Forum will again showcase the important work of our authors, and provides a platform to advance the industry. The 79th Annual Forum & Technology Display takes place May 16–18 in West Palm Beach, Florida, and features 250+ technical papers, 50 invited VIP speakers, nearly 70 exhibitors, two short courses and an industry tour. In addition, dozens of students, engineers, operators and leaders will be recognized during our 79th Annual Grand Awards Ceremony.

Last year's Annual Forum re-confirmed that it is the face-to-face interactions where the real spark of knowledge transfer and collaboration occurs. We hope that you can join us for another exceptional event: www.vtol.org/forum.

Forum 79 will be my last as Executive Director. At the end of the Awards Ceremony, I'll be passing the baton to our incoming Executive Director, Angelo Collins (see "VFS Board Selects Angelo Collins as New Executive Director," pg. 8). Angelo brings a new perspective, new energy and new priorities on how best to lead you — our members — in advancing vertical flight around the world.

I have agreed to stay on as the VFS Director of Strategy, where I will be able to focus more on the Society's strategic initiatives,



serving our members and strengthening relationships with other associations, governmental bodies and other partners.

Since I joined in 1996, VFS has been incredibly successful in advocating for significant advancements, through the support of our members. Today, the Society continues to actively engage in important advocacy efforts for VTOL workforce and education, research and development investments, and eVTOL policy and regulations across government agencies. We are recognized as the leading international organization working to advance vertical flight technology.

I am incredibly proud of what we have accomplished over the past dozen years. But it's not the eight VFS employees at headquarters who did this. The Society is successful because of you! Your participation as a VFS member has contributed to building an invaluable resource for the vertical flight industry. Our members have created more than 15,000 PDF documents in our online Vertical Flight Library from eight decades of meetings and articles in *Vertiflite*, plus thousands more in our online *Journal of the AHS*. We have hundreds of hours of webinars and short courses created by our members, all contributing to advancing VTOL technology.

With the recent achievements of the Future Vertical Lift (FVL) program, advanced civil rotorcraft and eVTOL demonstrators, the future looks brighter than ever for the vertical flight industry. However, there is much more work ahead and it's more important now than ever for everyone to stay engaged.

In the words of Igor Sikorsky, "Creative work ... remains a tremendously vital factor in the progress of mankind. The work of the individual still remains the spark which moves mankind ahead."

Your hard work and engagement in VFS are key to our future success — and yours. Together, we can reach even greater heights.

What do you think? Let us know at director@vtol.org.

