



Strengthening Our Army Partnership

By Angelo Collins, Executive Director

After successfully completing our 18th Electric Aircraft Symposium in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, your Executive Director flew directly to Huntsville, Alabama. Walking through Huntsville International Airport always makes me feel at home; it's a place where advertisements for helicopters (and, yes, even Future Vertical Lift) cover the walls as you head to baggage claim, where you're greeted with even more reminders of our wonderful Department of Defense (DoD) and the amazing efforts of our prime manufacturers and contractors to guarantee our security. It's a place where really anyone who appreciates vertical lift and Army Aviation will feel welcome.

On my agenda was a meeting with the Army Program Executive Office (PEO) Aviation at Redstone Arsenal (where over 50,000 civilians and contractors work every day), and meetings at the Von Braun Center, including with the Vertical Lift Consortium (VLC).

The Vertical Flight Society's relationship with the US Army begins at our founding in 1943, with the Society's first Honorary Fellow award given to Col. H. Franklin Gregory, US Army Air Corps, for his vision and support in recognizing the importance of helicopters in military applications. Gregory helped convince the US Army Air Corps to award a \$50,000 contract to Sikorsky to develop the XR-4, the first helicopter to be mass produced and the first helicopter accepted by the US military. In addition to having hundreds of Army civilians and contractors on the VFS membership rolls, we also have formal agreements. The Collaborative Educational Agreement between VFS and the Army Research Laboratory (ARL) aims to influence regional science, technology, engineering and math collaborative efforts that influence educational goals to benefit the Army, students, industry and non-profit organizations.

I had the pleasure of sitting down with Forrest Collier, Army PEO Aviation Chief of Staff and a Huntsville native. The meeting saw four key outcomes: 1) Army PEO Aviation commitment to join the VFS Board of Directors; 2) Pledge to redouble our collective efforts to encourage the study of vertical lift and celebrate Army Aviation employment opportunities; 3) Reaffirm the Army's support to the VLRCOEs, which ensure a healthy pipeline of engineers to support the Army and DoD; and 4) An agreement that PEO Aviation will explore other external research and development (R&D) efforts for possible collaboration, such as DARPA's high-speed VTOL program, SPRINT.


The Von Braun Center is a venue (and an area) bustling with development and growth as more people call Huntsville their home. In addition to the new hotels under construction in adjacent blocks, the Von Braun Center is evolving into a top-tier venue. My meeting with the Director of Events began with the sighting of a VFS sticker on display in her office, a good start



to a productive conversation on the possibility of hosting Forum 84 in Rocket City. We'll be submitting a request for proposals soon to the Huntsville Convention & Visitors Bureau as a next step — stay tuned.

Returning to the topic of the VLC, a consortium not new to VFS and its Executive Directors, with Rhett Flater, Mike Hirschberg and now myself serving as Board Members since its founding in 2010 with the support of VFS. Historically a non-voting member, this board meeting made a historic pivot with a vote to officially welcome the VFS board member as a participant with full voting rights. Our Society's objectives to support the VLC are simple: advocate for R&D spending in vertical flight, ensure funding for the VLRCOEs and secure continued commitment from the military to foster and fund their efforts from the lower technology readiness levels (TRLs) through to acquisition related to vertical flight.

Forum 81 will be held in Virginia Beach, about 30 minutes from Joint Base Langley-Eustis, home to the Army Training Support Center (ATSC) and hundreds of personnel from the US Army Combat Capabilities Development Command (CCDC) Aviation & Missile Center's Technology Development Directorate (TDD); Software, Simulation, Systems Engineering & Integration Directorate (S3I); and Systems Readiness Directorate (SRD). We had 100 authors from the Army publish at Forum 80 and hope to see more at Forum 81.

Our relationship with the Army is strong, and it will continue to strengthen over my tenure. As the largest operator of helicopters in the world, the Army should always feel at home here in the Society. 

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