

AHS is the



Vertical Flight Society

By Mike Hirschberg, AHS International Executive Director

AHS International is pleased to announce that the Society is rebranding to better reflect our membership and our role in the world.

After years of discussion and months of debate, the Board of Directors of AHS International voted to change the identity of AHS to the “Vertical Flight Society,” the moniker that the Society had been using in various forms for at least a half century. While not a legal name change, the “Vertical Flight Society” will become the “trade name” for AHS.

The Board approved the change on March 6, after studying the results of multiple surveys, considering the proud legacy of AHS, and debating how to best position the Society for the future. The Society will transition to our new name by Jan. 1, 2019.

A Bit of History

Although AHS was founded 75 years ago as the “American Helicopter Society, Inc.,” the expansion of the Society beyond helicopters and beyond the US industry began with its birth in 1943. During World War II, engineers and leaders from allied countries joined the nascent Society and took leadership positions. Autogiros, convertiplanes and more advanced configurations were always considered part of the domain of AHS.

As noted in previous issues of *Vertiflite*, the AHS brand evolved over the decades to be ever-more expansive. In the 1950s, when the Society also began to hold a “Western Forum” — west of the Mississippi River — the Annual Forum (then held every year in Washington, D.C.) was called the “Annual National Forum.” In the 1970s, it was renamed the “Annual National V/STOL Forum” — to expand its brand beyond helicopters. But by 1979 (Forum 35), the Society’s leadership recognized that “National” and “American” were no longer entirely accurate representations of the organization; “National” was dropped and the word “International” was added below the American Helicopter Society logo. (See www.vtol.org/history for more background.)

As part of the post-Cold War drawdown, the Board of Directors created an ad-hoc Charter Committee in 1992 to review the Society’s charter and the changing industry conditions. The

The Vertical Flight Society Logo

The colors of the AHS logo have long been the red, white and blue of the American flag, signifying the heritage of the Society; these colors are retained in the new logo. The hummingbird, named “Hovey” decades ago, endures as the symbol of vertical flight and of the Society; she also remains outlined in yellow to evoke the gold fringe and eagle that embellish the flag. The name of the Society is also in blue, providing an enduring bond with the vertical flight capabilities of the hummingbird. Finally, the red arc depicts the tip path of rotating blades that generate lift or thrust — the quintessential essence of technology that defines the domain of the Vertical Flight Society. For more on the history of the AHS logo through the ages, go to www.vtol.org/hovey.

committee concluded that the mission of AHS was “to satisfy the technological, educational, informational and advocacy needs of the worldwide vertical flight community.” This articulation of why AHS exists has continued to be reiterated through the decades.

The Society began branding itself “An International Vertical Flight Organization” in 1992. The following year, as AHS was preparing to celebrate its 50th anniversary, the Society asked its membership what it thought about the name “The American Helicopter Society” and whether a change was due. As printed in the July/Aug 1993 issue of *Vertiflite*, there were several people who strongly objected to changing the name, but about twice as many who advocated for a change to better reflect the realities of the global helicopter market and the Society’s international vertical flight mission (see www.vtol.org/name for those survey results and more historical details).

The Society officially rebranded as “AHS International” in 1997 with the tagline “The Vertical Flight Society.” So, like BAE Systems, CAE, MD Helicopters and many others, AHS sought — though somewhat unsuccessfully — to transcend the abbreviation.

In 2012, AHS legally changed the name to the “American Helicopter Society International, Inc.” to officially denote the Society’s global perspective. AHS also modified the tagline to “The Vertical Flight Technical Society” to emphasize what was most unique about the Society. However, members argued that this seemed overly specific, excluding important core initiatives like safety, regulations and advocacy. In addition, “VFTS” was considered to be unpronounceable and unnecessarily long as a standalone name.

Recent Membership Surveys

Over the past several years, the AHS International Board of Directors has continually increased the Society’s emphasis on a much broader outreach strategy, embracing professionals worldwide and technologies beyond traditional rotorcraft. Significant changes to the Board and the Society’s membership policies were made in 2013 to attract more members working on vertical flight technology.

This past September, AHS sent out a survey, asking members for their perspectives on the Society, its international mission and its name. The survey noted that “the Board is considering whether a change in the name of the Society would better support the new policies and strategy [made in 2013] to attract the wider constituency, and better achieve our vision of being ‘An international organization that advocates, promotes and supports global vertical flight technology and professional development.’”

A number of alternative names were posed with the primary question: “How do you think that a name such as these would capture AHS and its mission, and position it for growth?” Revealingly, neither keeping the name “American Helicopter Society International” nor removing what “AHS” stands for were very popular. The largest number of respondents felt that “Vertical Flight Society” was the best option; it also had the least negative response (other than no change).

A second survey sent Nov. 30 asked members’ preference for selecting this most popular option — changing to the “Vertical Flight Society” — versus not changing the name, in order to gain additional insights for the Board to consider on this important choice. The more pointedly-worded question was “How well do you think each option’s name, logo and branding represent the best future direction for the Society, while balancing the historical legacy of the organization?” Against this question, the results of this second survey were closer, but slightly more respondents still supported changing the name to the “Vertical Flight Society.” Interestingly, students and young professionals under the age of 35 had a 2:1 preference for changing the name of AHS to the “Vertical Flight Society.”

Why Now

Each of the five major helicopter manufacturers has now dropped the word “helicopter” from its brand name. And each is currently developing non-helicopter VTOL aircraft for the future, including advanced tiltrotors — the Leonardo AW609 and Next Generation Civil Tiltrotor, and the Bell V-280 Valor — and advanced compounds like the Airbus Racer, Sikorsky S-97 Raider and Sikorsky Boeing SB>1 Defiant. In addition to the V-280 and SB>1, the Joint Multi-Role (JMR) technology demonstration effort includes the Karem Aircraft KVL-3+ optimum speed tiltrotor and the AVX Aircraft Compound Coaxial Helicopter. Most of the traditional helicopter companies are now also developing electric and hybrid-electric VTOL designs for urban air mobility and military applications.

Beyond even advanced rotorcraft, the AHS Technical Meeting on Aeromechanics Design for Transformative Vertical Flight and the 5th Annual Transformative Vertical Flight Workshop in January, hosted by the AHS San Francisco Bay Area Chapter, was a watershed event for AHS and the vertical flight community. AHS is now a recognized leader for the electric VTOL community and appreciated for bringing the eVTOL technical community together.

During the recent Board of Directors reviews, one Board member stated: “I strongly support changing the name to ‘The Vertical

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Flight Society.’ I believe this name aptly represents what the Society is and what it wants to be in future. The past few years have seen a significant growth in companies venturing into vertical lift for various applications like air taxi, drones, etc. At this juncture, it is important for AHS to broaden its reach and position itself for the future.”

Another Board member reasoned that, “Given the strong interest in [vertical flight] for potential new applications like urban mobility,” he supported “changing the name to be more encompassing, as the expertise of the Society will be an enabler for this emerging market.”

The Once and Future Vertical Flight Society

AHS has already been known as “The Vertical Flight Society” for 20 years, since rebranding as “AHS International” in 1997. This rebranding (without a legal name change) came after considerable thought and debate by the AHS Board, staff and membership, over several years.

In the 1993 survey, a number of alternative names were suggested by members, and printed (without attribution) in *Vertiflite*. They included: The Helicopter Society, American V/STOL Society, International Helicopter Society (IHS), International Rotorcraft Society (IRS), International Powered Lift Association, International *Vertiflite* Organization, *Vertiso* and many others. One prescient member, however, submitted the following:

“Yes, I believe there should be a name change but not just because of the international connotations. We represent all of vertical flight to include tilt prop-rotors, conventional rotorcraft, compound and composite rotorcraft and VTOL aircraft such as fan-in-wing, tilt-wing, deflected thrust, etc. If we truly want to cover all VTOL concepts, a name change is in order and I would recommend the ‘Vertical Flight Society.’”

In the best tradition of the 75-year legacy of AHS, the Vertical Flight Society will continue to represent all vertical flight concepts, technologies and technical disciplines. We will continue to execute our vision to be the “international organization that advocates, promotes and supports global vertical flight technology and professional development.”

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

