



## The Resurgence of our Local Chapters

By Angelo Collins, Executive Director

It is safe to say that the Vertical Flight Society's regional chapter activities have been surging in the post-COVID-19 era. As you would expect, positive momentum slowed in 2020, with dinner meetings and in-person events becoming a fond but distant memory of days before. To combat the waning participation of our chapters, many executed a mix of virtual content and outdoor events, with a slow ramp up of in-person events starting in 2022. Understandably, some chapters saw little to no activity during this period. Thankfully, we saw a great resurgence in activity starting in 2023, with the momentum continuing into 2024.

I was able to make a quick trip up to Boston, Massachusetts, and joined our East New England Chapter for their dinner meeting on Jan. 23. GE Aerospace's Harry Nahatis — the current President of the VFS Board of Directors and President of the VFS East New England Chapter — served as the MC for the evening. I was a surprise attendee and was joined by my sisters Angelina and Stephanie Collins, brother Stephen Collins, and father George Collins.

I provided a brief welcome and emphasized the importance of growing our corporate membership base. Peter Smart from Teledyne FLIR showed a video highlighting their small Hornet drone, and its expanding implementation in Ukraine. Peter Schmidt, COO and co-founder of Transcend Air Corp., introduced their Vy 421 concept, which is a long-range, eight-passenger, tiltwing, hybrid-electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft. It's about 25% larger than the company's original Vy 400 six-passenger, hybrid-electric design. David Stepanek, Executive Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer of Bristow Group, was the main speaker and provided a look at the future of Bristow as it assesses the adoption of eVTOL platforms. Rotor Technologies, based in Nashua, New Hampshire, showed up in strength and announced that New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu would attend the first-ever public flight of their R550X autonomous helicopter on Jan. 30.

I was also invited by the VFS Philadelphia Chapter to serve as the guest speaker for their dinner meeting on Jan. 25, just two days after the East New England Chapter meeting. Insight Global sponsored the dinner and introduced their company, which provides staffing services internationally. I gave a presentation entitled, "Thoughts from the Vertical Flight Society Executive Director," which summarized our 2023 activities at the international level. Membership has hit a plateau of around 6,400 with corporate membership in a shallow decline for the first time in 10 years. I also provided a summary of our 2023 financials, including general expenses and revenue sources, which was received quite well by the attendees as it is information

they're not used to seeing. I also presented a summary of Vertical Flight Foundation (VFF) Scholarship donation since 2018, with a 60% increase year over year, topping out at over \$70,000 in contributions in our most recent annual donation period. The chapters have become larger contributors to the scholarship, but individual donors make up our largest contribution source. I am hopeful that more of our corporate members will begin providing contributions in the future.


In more good news, I announced a membership agreement between the American Helicopter Museum & Education Center and VFS, where members in good standing of each organization can now get discounted membership dues from the other. Discount codes will become available in February 2024. Closing out the presentation, I gave my thoughts on the legacy of Future Vertical Lift (FVL), the modernized Apache, and what the future might hold for the V-22.

Another topic that I spoke about, and I'll expand on further in this commentary, are my thoughts on our chapters.

After commencing my role as Executive Director in June, I began auditing our current chapter rosters and accessing their activity levels. I decided it would be best to set up a call every two months with the chapter presidents to get to know them better and receive direct feedback and guidance on their interests and requests from headquarters. It was clear that the chapters are eager for direction and identifying priorities and synergies together. For informational resources, we are working to establish a community for chapters on our Hover professional networking platform to get caught up on services currently being provided, "cheat sheets" and other "standard operating procedures" (SOPs). It will also be a location to post and share news with other chapters.

A general theme I heard was the disappointment in many company policies that limit attendance to the Forum and other VFS events, strict approval processes for abstracts and publication, and the partial or unapproved requests to bill admin/overhead for VFS activities. We hear their concerns and wish to work with the management of our generous corporate members to find resolutions for these issues.

I plan to stay in touch with our chapter leaders; it's been wonderful to get to know some of our best and brightest in the community and learn about what matters most to them.

I hope to join our many other chapters at their upcoming events and dinner meetings in 2024. Our chapter system is an excellent means to come together as a Society to network, learn and promote our mutual interest in advancing vertical flight. Please let me know if you have any thoughts on how we can make an already thriving chapter system function even better. 

*What do you think? Let me know at [director@vtol.org](mailto:director@vtol.org).*