PRESS RELEASE

Dr. Sheree Utash Named 2026 Wichita Aero Club Trophy Recipient

Trophy Gala to take place in January 2027

WICHITA, Kan. (Nov. 2, 2026) – The Wichita Aero Club (WAC) announced Dr. Sheree Utash, President of WSU Tech and VP of Workforce Development for WSU, as the recipient of the 2026 Wichita Aero Club Trophy. This annual award honors individuals, groups or organizations with deep ties to the Wichita region who have demonstrated exceptional achievements in aviation or aerospace.

“Sheree has been a transformational leader in developing education and skills to meet the aviation industry’s workforce demands. Through the National Center for Aviation Training, she leads Kansas’ largest technical college and has provided the vision to power the next generation of the workforce,” said Ashley Bowen Cook, Executive Director of the Wichita Aero Club and Owner/CEO, Alpha Charlie Marketing.

The award presentation will take place at the Wichita Aero Club’s annual Trophy Gala on Saturday, January 30, 2027, where aviation leaders and community members will gather to celebrate Dr. Utash’s contributions.

The nomination included the following remarks:

Dr. Sheree Utash has redefined aviation education through transformative programs at WSU Tech, creating innovative industry partnerships and pioneering initiatives that address workforce needs, position Wichita as a national leader in aviation training, and inspire future aviation professionals.

“I am truly humbled and deeply honored to be selected as this year’s Wichita Aero Club Trophy recipient. To be recognized by an organization that represents an industry so deeply woven into the fabric of Wichita, and one that has been such an important part of my professional journey, is incredibly meaningful. I have had the privilege of working alongside extraordinary leaders, industry partners, educators, and colleagues who share a passion for aviation and developing the workforce that will carry this industry into the future**,”** said Utash.

About Sheree Utash

Dr. Sheree Utash, Ed.D., serves as President of Wichita State University Campus of Applied Sciences and Technology (WSU Tech), formerly known as Wichita Area Technical College (WATC). Since assuming the presidency in 2015, she has led WSU Tech through a period of significant transformation, including the pivotal 2018 affiliation with Wichita State University and the transition from WATC to WSU Tech. Prior to her presidency, she served as Vice President of Academic Affairs for eight years, where she expanded high-demand technical programs and enhanced academic standards. Today, WSU Tech is Kansas' largest technical college, serving over 8,000 students, and is the managing partner for the National Center for Aviation Training.

Her expertise in securing and managing grant-funded initiatives includes leadership of the National Aviation Consortium, a $15 million grant project that united two-year colleges across five states to meet the aviation industry’s workforce demands.

Beyond WSU Tech, Dr. Utash has been a prominent voice in workforce policy. She was selected as a member of the American Workforce Policy Advisory Board and has testified before the U.S. Senate’s Commerce Committee on Aviation, advocating for growth in the aviation industry and the critical need for skilled aviation workers. Her civic leadership includes being named Honorary Commander of the McConnell 22nd Refueling Wing in 2018, SkillsUSA Postsecondary Administrator of the Year for Kansas

in 2017, and NAACP Wichita Chapter Person of the Year in 2016. She was inducted into the Kansas Aviation Hall of Fame in 2024.

About the WAC Trophy

The Wichita Aero Club Trophy is awarded annually to a living person, group or organization with a strong relationship to the greater Wichita area based on exemplary achievements in the field of aviation or aerospace accomplished during the past year or, as appropriate, over an extended period or career. The Trophy Selection Committee includes members of the WAC Board of Directors and prominent members of the aviation community.

Prior WAC Trophy Recipients

- **2025:** Brian Barents, Aviation Industry Leader
- **2024:** Fred Berry, Co-founder and Chairman Emeritus of Berry Companies, Inc.
- **2023:** U.S. Senator Jerry Moran
- **2022:** Dr. John Tomblin, National Institute for Aviation Research (NIAR)
- **2021:** Ron Ryan, Pilot, Airline Founder and Philanthropist
- **2020:** No award due to COVID-19
- **2019:** Clay Lacy, Legendary Pilot and Founder of Clay Lacy Aviation
- **2018:** Jack Pelton, Experimental Aircraft Association CEO
- **2017:** Lynn Nichols & Yingling Aviation
- **2016:** Paul Bowen, Aviation Photographer
- **2015:** Doc's Friends Restoration Team
- **2014:** Al Higdon, Co-Founder of Sullivan Higdon & Sink Advertising
- **2013:** Russell W. Meyer, Jr., Chairman Emeritus, Cessna Aircraft Company
- **2012:** John O'Leary & Airbus Americas Engineering
- **2011:** Jeff Turner, Spirit AeroSystems CEO
- **2010:** Velma Wallace

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