

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF RISE AIR

ISSUE 1 2024 • WINTER EDITION

connections

**FROM THE
PRESIDENT AND CEO**

Welcome to the first edition
of *Connections*, the official
publication of Rise Air



**Generations in
Aviation: Part One**

**The Dziret'ái Pilot
Training Program**

Black Lake First Nation

The first stop on Rise Air's
community profiles





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From the President and CEO

Connections is special: it's your magazine, focusing on the unique stories that are important to you, the air traveller in northern Saskatchewan.

Things are different in the north; we're closer to our friends, and our family ties run deep. We're reflecting that in our stories. Many of our people here at Rise Air are second- and even third-generation employees, and we're inspiring our children to follow in our footsteps. In this edition, we're profiling Black Lake Denesuline First Nation, a community we've been serving for almost 70 years, and a major shareholder in our airline. Additionally, we're celebrating the launch of the Dziret'ai Pilot Training Program, a pathway to a rewarding career right here at home.

Our sponsors, the advertisers in this magazine, are our friends too. We're grateful that they've chosen to show their commitment to Rise Air and the people we serve. With their support, *Connections* has taken off with this launch edition.

We're a special airline because Rise Air is 100-per-cent owned by the people we serve- and we're committed to providing the air service that is essential to the well-being and success of the communities where we fly. This is not an easy mission: northern Saskatchewan experiences weather conditions as extreme as anywhere in the world; airport infrastructure doesn't meet the standards found in the south; weather reporting is poor or non-existent; and landings on rough, unpaved runways take a toll on aircraft and people.

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Rise Air is the thread that binds the fabric of Saskatchewan's north. If you're reading this, you may be a resident of the Athabasca Basin heading south for a medical appointment, a professional starting another shift in a remote community, a telecommunications specialist on your way to perform maintenance on a remote cell tower, or any one of a myriad of people who are making your lives and careers here in the province we call home.

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Derek Nice,
President and CEO, Rise Air



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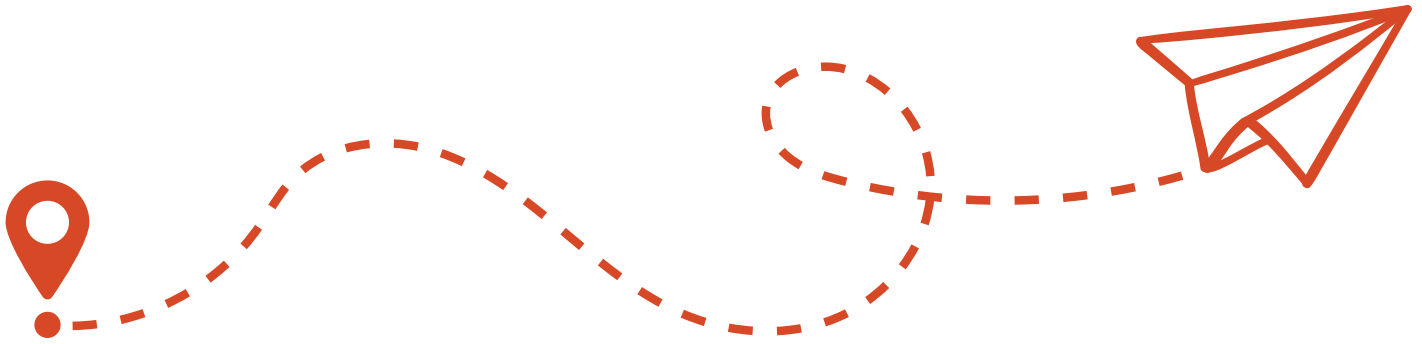
Father Porte
Memorial Déné School.

Welcome to Black Lake First Nation

The first stop on Rise Air's
community profiles

BY NIKITA DAY

Nestled along the shores from which it gets its name, Black Lake is a Denesuline community located near the very top of northern Saskatchewan. In order to reach Black Lake, one must fly into the neighbouring community of Stony Rapids and travel 22 kilometres by an all-season gravel road. While the current population of this community sits at approximately 2,500 people, the presence of the Denesuline in northern Saskatchewan can be traced back approximately 8,000 to 12,000 years ago.

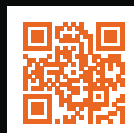


Celebrating and protecting the natural resources of this place has remained a top priority for the people of Black Lake, with many community events centring around harvesting all that the land has to offer. Community Elder Pauline Thatcher loves, in particular, Black Lake's fishing derbies, which are held annually and bring all of the neighbouring communities together. "Recently we had a derby – I believe it was in the second week of September. It was a walleye derby, and for whoever catches the biggest fish, there is a huge prize. Sometimes it's skidoos, ATVs; this year they went with money: \$10,000 for first place." Black Lake also hosts shore lunches, with a weigh station where participants can both weigh their fish and grab some food. "Fishing is our livelihood for surviving. We don't catch and release," says Thatcher. "We keep them and save them for the wintertime. We harvest it, we don't abuse it. People just respect that in our area – we don't abuse any animal whatsoever. The only time we have to kill is to survive." Sharing, working together and respecting traditional knowledge are important values held here. "We have a huge garden right by the band office run by Black Lake Ventures. I believe there are two or three individuals. They start harvesting and we get lots of fresh stuff through the summer. It gets delivered to Elders, whoever needs it, and to big families, so it's really nice."



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Community Elder Pauline Thatcher.

In the 1970s, Black Lake First Nation embarked on economic development initiatives, which introduced a new approach to community growth. Initial funding was allocated to assist members with traditional activities such as hunting, fishing and trapping. By the 1980s, the Black Lake Development Corporation was established, marking the formation of its first Board and Management team. This organization aimed to enhance services, create jobs and provide training, along with various business opportunities for the community. The leadership went on to initiate a holding company to work as a distinct business entity under the Nation’s ownership, and in 2008, Black Lake Ventures was launched. They now have investments in four companies, maintain leases to Northwest Co., RCMP Housing and BLV Building, and manage projects around the community including the community garden, radio station, line-cutting and SaskPower projects.

Thatcher works as an Elder advisor for Cameco at the mine site. “I go there once a month, kind of like a liaison for people that can’t speak up for themselves, and support HR and support Cameco, how well they’re doing with the kids in the north.” The work of community members like Thatcher has been making a big difference for the young people and families of Black Lake. “We do lots of events in the community; we do kids programs after school, the preventions. Kids get together

A photograph of two people sitting at a wooden table in a rustic setting. The person on the left is a man wearing a colorful patterned sweater and glasses, smiling. The person on the right is a woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue hoodie, sitting and playing an acoustic guitar. The background shows wooden walls and a door.

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BLACK LAKE FIRST NATION

making cultural stuff. They have women's groups, men's groups, Elders' groups and youth groups every night, so you won't be bored if you come to Black Lake." These programs take place at the community centre and often involve, as Thatcher put it, "inventing things," whether it be crafts, sewing or, her personal favourite, beading. "I bead logos. I'm beading a huge logo right now – a Points North logo, two feet

by two feet. I also do moccasins. You name it, I do it." Many community members also bead on a commission basis.

Music serves as another key component of the Dene culture, with the drum in particular being well respected, often used to begin ceremonies. And music continues to bring out both young and old to enjoy together in Black Lake. "There's

groups of young boys, teenagers – they formed their own band, a local band," says Thatcher. "They're becoming big and they've been performing at weddings. Everybody's shocked. They're really good!" Black



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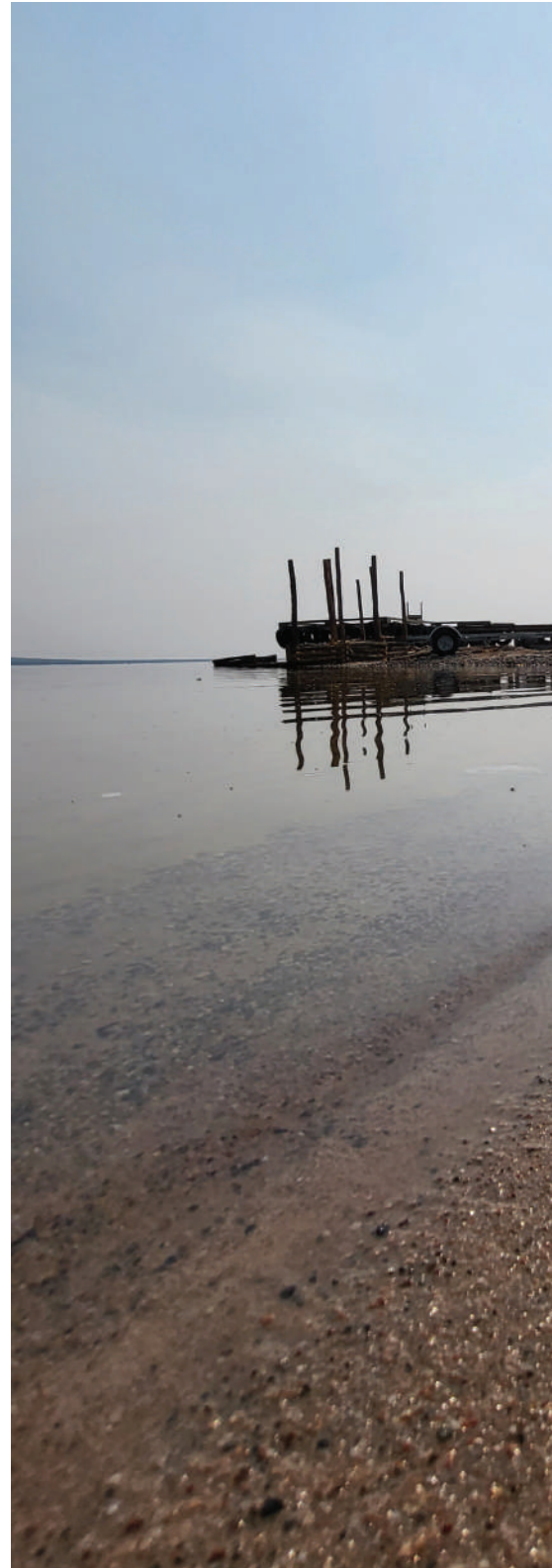
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Lake also boasts its own radio station with two local broadcasters, playing music, running local advertisements and providing updates on what's coming up around the community in both Dene and English.

The Dene language is still very prevalent, and the youth haven't lost their culture, notes Thatcher. "Most of the kids here talk in their own language, and they hardly speak English unless they have to. Even little kids – they'll have a chat with Elders. The language is so unique up here, and every household talks in Dene." The K-12 school, Father Porte Memorial School, has Elders working with students on

language and culture, with most of the staff being made up of local professional Dene teachers. The Dene people used to live a nomadic lifestyle, following the migration of caribou herds, and this is another practice that both Elders and youth alike continue to take part in, says Thatcher. "They'll have a team of young men go up hunting and provide for the summer. Starting in February, they'll be harvesting.





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SCHULTE STRATHAUS 



Freddie Throassie.

Young people will go on the skidoo up into the territories and harvest caribou and bring them back to the community and serve it to Elders.” Moose also serves as an important source of protein, and youth go with Elders to a band-owned campsite on the Black Lake North Side to harvest moose meat for one whole week before bringing it back to the community. “A lot of Elders take the youth up north, in through the territories into the land,” says Thatcher. “They teach them how to live off the land, how to survive. That’s becoming big again; we lost that for a while, but it’s becoming big again.”

Freddie Throassie was the Chief of Black Lake for four years and has spent the majority of his life working in different mining companies. “I was raised out on the land before and I’m really fortunate that I got to learn that. Now I live in a modern sort of world you could call it, but in combining the two, I feel like I was fortunate enough to have been educated in both worlds.” Throassie has been part of the process of passing important survival skills down to the youth for a long time. “I was doing canoe trips until about 2005 and I did it for about 20 years. It’s a survival canoe trip, and basically what it

means is you go out on the land with a whole bunch of kids and live off the land... So I taught kids how to do that since 2005. The longest trip that I ever did was 29 days without [bringing] food, and I took 12 kids on that trip.” Throassie also works to pass on what he calls the “traditional protocols,” often through the act of storytelling, which the Dene people have been utilizing out on the land for generations. “In respect with the animals, in respect with the people and respect with mother nature, all those require laws which I call protocols. I think that we need to revive that, and in order to revive that, we need to go out on the land. We need to be one with the land. That’s who we are.” Throassie is 68 years old but still travels around to other communities in the north to learn and share this vital knowledge. Most recently he was in the Northwest Territories to learn more about the First Nations’ caribou guardianship program. “The resources that we have out here I think are really important to protect. Not only just the caribou but the other wildlife as well. And I think as stewards of the earth, Mother Earth, the environment and the resources that are out there, we need to be part of that in order to help preserve it for future generations.”

For visitors coming into the community, Black Lake offers both adventure and hospitality. There are four local taxi services, as well as vehicle rentals available just 16 kilometres away in Stony Rapids at Scott’s General Store. A fully serviced hospital also exists right in the community, complete with ambulances and a rotating staff of nurses and doctors on site at all times. Visitors and locals can enjoy the natural beauty of northern Saskatchewan’s Athabasca Basin region, including trails, waterfalls, camp sites and fishing, to name just a few. The community hosts an annual week-long winter carnival in February with skidoo races, snowshoe races, hockey tournaments, volleyball tournaments, as well as traditional hand games, played by both youth and Elders. But what truly sets Black Lake apart is its welcoming spirit. The community prides itself on togetherness, ensuring that when something needs to be done, everyone pitches in. “This is an awesome place to live,” says Thatcher “People are friendly... If you’re stuck anywhere, if they can, people will help get you out. When the carnival comes and the surrounding people come into the community, everybody has a place to stay – they don’t go to hotels. Everybody’s welcome, and when an outsider comes in they open their doors to make them feel welcome. If they don’t have room, they’ll find you a room.” 🐾

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Generations in Aviation: Part One

Meet the
familial
duos of
Rise Air

BY RICK GARRICK



A group of familial duos have turned aviation into a family pursuit with life-long careers in aviation at Rise Air and its predecessor airlines across northern Saskatchewan.

Robert Pacey III, a pilot with Rise Air, recalls helping his father Rob Pacey Sr., an aircraft maintenance engineer with Rise Air, on repair jobs across the north.

“Growing up I would go to work with my dad any time he had rescue missions or had to go out of town to fix different airplanes,” Pacey says. “I’d tag along with him and hold the flashlight and help however I could at a young age, and that spiked my interest in aviation.”

Pacey worked on the dock during high school, and then in aircraft maintenance as an apprentice for about three years after high school before pursuing his pilot’s licence. He received his private licence in 2018 and his commercial licence in 2021 and began flying a Beaver for another airline.

“I switched to Rise Air when they had a position there and flew the Beaver until 2023. That winter I went on the Twin Otter as First Officer,” Pacey says, noting that he flew the Twin Otter on skis this past winter while doing exploration work. “I’ve landed on rivers [over the years] and

done lots of exploration and shore-line work, no docks, and having to fly around firefighters to different spots, fighting wildfires, setting up sprinklers.”

Pacey says flying in northern Saskatchewan is different and more challenging, but there is also a small-town vibe.

“Everybody knows everybody,” Pacey says. “You know your customers, you know who you’re flying, where you’re going, everybody knows you by your first name. I’ve never worked a day flying in my life because you just love what you do.”

Pacey Sr. was introduced to the aviation industry when he was about 12 years old.

“I got a summer job when I was 14 on the dock [but] I didn’t do a whole lot of dock work. They actually threw me in the Twin Otter all summer on the right seat, so I was the flying dockhand,” Pacey Sr. says. “In the evenings I used to help them change starters, generators or pump floats.”

Pacey Sr. says he began an aircraft maintenance engineer apprenticeship when he was 15 years old and worked across northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba before signing on with a predecessor to Rise Air about 36 years ago.



Rob Pacey III.

“With both of my boys, I used to take them on road trips with me,” Pacey Sr. says. “I used to take them all over the place, fixing airplanes on the weekends, and I think they got into the industry that way.”

Pacey Sr. says he owns his own Cessna 150 for flying as a private pilot, so his son did his flight training in the Cessna 150.

“He was soloing when he was 15 in my 150,” Pacey Sr. says. “So, he was flying the 150 before he could get his driver’s licence.”



Rob Pacey Sr.





Image taken prior to Rise Air removing helicopters from their fleet.

Mauricio Gallegos Jr., who replaced his father Mauricio Gallegos Sr. as Avionics Manager at Rise Air when he retired after 42 years of service, recalls working summers at a predecessor to Rise Air with his father when he was 17 to 18 years old.

“I used to work summers with him, and the field was really interesting to me because I was always interested in electronics,” Gallegos Jr. says, noting that they used to replace resistors, transistors and other parts on the equipment back then. “In high school I had access to a course for electronics, building little circuits and [learning] electronic theory, so when I came to work with him it was basically the same thing – everything was electrical.”

Gallegos Jr. says he took an electronics engineering technologist program at college before returning to work with his father as an apprentice.

“Once I got in it, I couldn’t see myself doing anything else,” Gallegos Jr. says. “I spent over 30 years working alongside him, so we were always together and travelled together and worked together. He was always happy that I was there and that I was actually doing something related to the field that he took himself.”

Gallegos Jr. says he enjoyed working on the aircraft at different locations across the north over the years.

“There was always something different to do,” Gallegos Jr. says. “You’re always trying to figure out issues and helping your colleagues to make sure the airplane is safe for flight.”

Gallegos Sr. left his home country of Chile to pursue his career in Canada, where he began working at a predecessor to Rise Air in 1978.

“Since I had quite a bit of experience in avionics, it was quite easy for me to become knowledgeable on the company’s type of aircraft,” Gallegos Sr. says, noting that the airline built its own avionics shop in the early 1980s and did work for other companies or private citizens on their aircraft. “At one moment I had six [technicians] working with me for avionics.”

Gallegos Sr. says he enjoyed working with his son for about 30 years at the airline.

“He was a very responsible person. He earned the trust of everybody in the company,” Gallegos Sr. says. “We worked together, sometimes alone, sometimes with other guys.”

Gallegos Sr. says he worked almost everywhere in Saskatchewan during his career.



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“I was in the Northwest Territories too, way up close to the Arctic,” Gallegos Sr. says. “Working in the north was hard, especially in the winter. In some places we didn’t have a hangar, so we had to work in the open air. We had to work really hard to get things done in adverse conditions.”

Nathan Catte, Prince Albert Base Engineer at Rise Air and part of *Wings* magazine’s Top 20 Under 40 list, recalls travelling with his father Wayne Catte, a former Base Engineer at a predecessor to Rise Air, on road trips and rescue missions across the north.

“I was flying around all over and helping as much as a small kid could help,” Catte says. “We wouldn’t even be able to do that anymore. I definitely did hold the flashlight.”

Catte says his father also helped him during his career, noting that he did his apprenticeship at the base where his father worked.



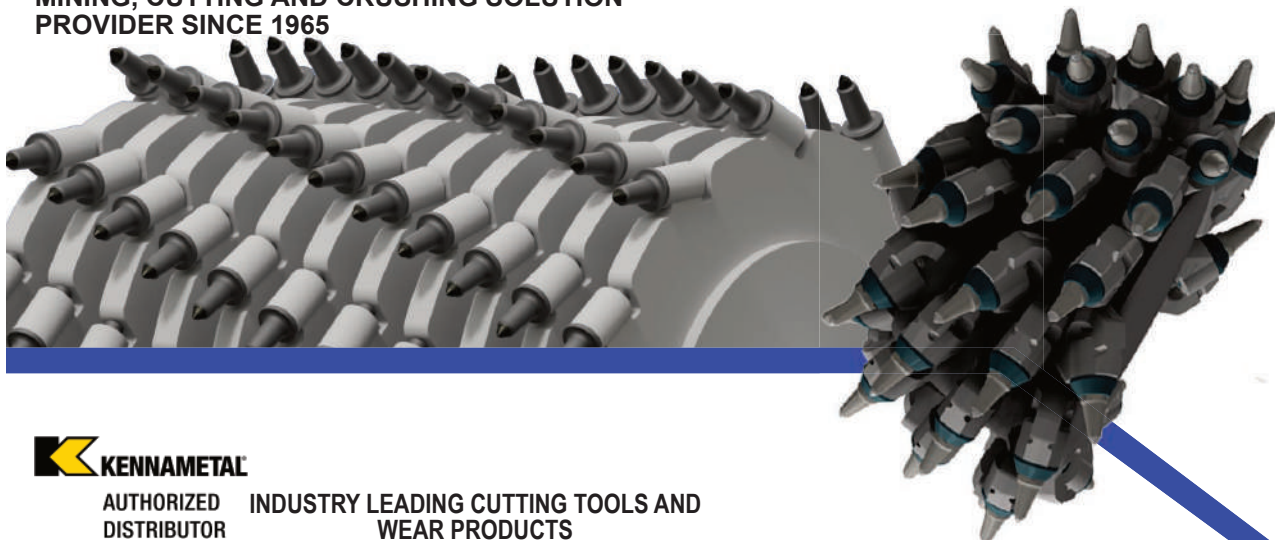
Nathan and Wayne Catte.



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“We worked together directly for four or five years until I moved to another base,” Catte says.

Catte says his career is a fun job because of the different aircraft they fly and all of the different bases they have across the north.

“It’s different every day and interesting too,” Catte says.

Catte adds that aviation is important for connecting the communities in the north as well as for tourism, exploration and trapping.

“It’s how people get to their traplines, it’s how camps get their food,” Catte says. “In northern Saskatchewan, there are hundreds of thousands of lakes, it’s mostly lakes everywhere and there’s very few roads. Most of our roads going into the north aren’t even useable year-round.”

Wayne says it was a pleasure working with his son at the airline.

“But he was very capable, so I preferred working with him,” Wayne says. “We were involved in quite a lot of different recovery items

– we’ve done engine changes on the Twin Otter, and we’ve done an engine change in -30 C weather.”

Wayne says they also helped to repair an engine on a Beaver as the winter ice was on its way.

“On Thursday we got there, and Saturday we were ready to fly back

to Stony Rapids on that particular plane,” Wayne says. “We made a platform, and we had a device so we could pull the engine right on the floats. They were long hours though. We got up at 5:00 in the morning and worked ‘til midnight, but it was always a pleasure working with Nathan.”



Anson and Austin Attree.

Austin Attree, Aircraft Maintenance Engineer Apprentice at Rise Air, recalls flying with his father Anson Attree, Maintenance Control Manager North at Rise Air, on his airplane and checking out his work when he was young.

“I knew for sure that was something I wanted to do for my career,” Attree says, noting that he started his career by helping out after school during high school. “Eventually they hired me as a full-time apprentice after I graduated.”

Attree says he is very happy with his career and being able to work with his father. He has completed three years of RRC Polytech’s four-year

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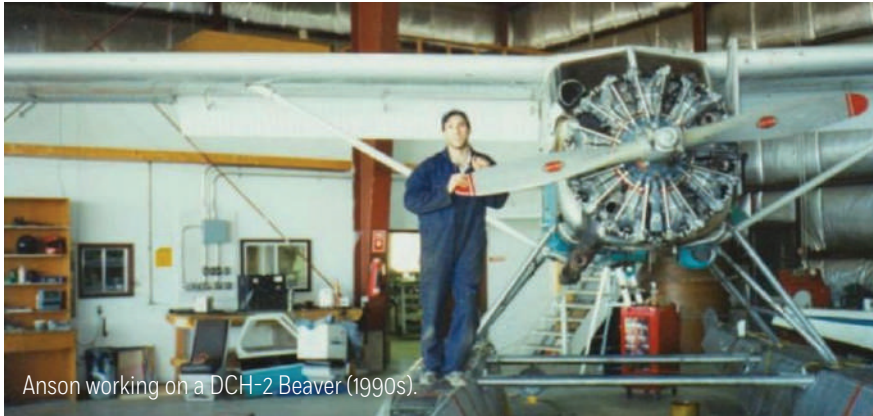
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Anson working on a DCH-2 Beaver (1990s).

Aircraft Maintenance Engineer Apprenticeship Program.

“It’s living the dream,” Attree says. “I’ve definitely had about six years of experience now. I’m just about finished school and there’s still a lot to learn – we’re always learning every day.”

Attree says he enjoys working on all of the airplanes they service at their base, including the medevac aircraft.

“It’s very rewarding knowing that I’m fixing something that helps save people’s lives,” Attree says. “It’s very rewarding and it makes me pretty proud to be able to work where I am. It’s a lifestyle – there’s always something to learn about airplanes.”

Anson says he was also introduced to aviation by his father, who was an aircraft mechanic.

“I kind of just grew up around airplanes as a kid, and [my father] had his own private airplane, so on Sundays, we were going flying with dad,” Anson says, noting that he started working with a predecessor of Rise Air in 1988. “I got my Aircraft Maintenance Engineer Licence, and I’ve been with the company for 36 years. It’s rewarding to have a long career and very exciting, obviously, to work with my son.”

Anson says he loves working in the north of Saskatchewan. “The base we work at here – we’re kind of like the heavy maintenance base,” Anson says. “The aircraft comes down from the north, we do inspections and repairs on them and then send them back up north.”


Anson says the maintenance staff work on different shifts, with the



Grandpa Grahame Attree with his Aeronca Chief (1970s).

operation going for 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

“Aviation around this part [of the province] is vital to serving the people of the north,” Anson says. “You know you’re working on airplanes that are providing that service to get people to where they’ve got to go.”

Stay tuned for part two of “Generations in Aviation,” where we will hear from the women of Rise Air. 



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The Dziret'ái Pilot Training Program

Rise Air's first class is now in session

BY MATTHEW BRADFORD

It's blue skies ahead for Rise Air's Dziret'ái Pilot Training Program. After launching its Indigenous workforce development initiative in September 2024, the airline is en route to training 10 candidates from local communities to become professional pilots with the Saskatoon airline.

"Being an Indigenous-owned airline, the number-one reason we dreamed up this program was to provide opportunities for employment for people in the north and open doors for individuals who wouldn't necessarily have the opportunity to follow their passion and become a pilot," says Tracy Young-McLean, VP/CHRO at Rise Air.

The program is geared towards Indigenous candidates from the Athabasca Basin. It is focused on two years of fully funded pilot training at the Mitchinson Flight Centre's headquarters in Saskatoon. Today, 15 hand-picked trainees are undergoing the first year's Elevated Skills Program with the goal of being one of 10 selected to

move into the second year of hands-on pilot training.

The Dziret'ái Pilot Training Program's first class will be put to the test over the next two years, both in class and the cockpit. Those who stay the course until graduation in June 2026 will earn their private and commercial pilot licences (CPL) and several qualifications, including night rating, multi-engine rating, instrument rating, Intermediate Air Transport Rating (IATRA) and King or Twin Otter type rating.

The students are in experienced hands with Mitchinson Flight Centre's team. The company has been training pilots since 1946 and was recently approved by Transport Canada for an Integrated Airline Transport Pilot Licence program.

"They set a much higher standard and level of training than regular programs," says Dan Glass, President of Mitchinson. "The Dziret'ái students will directly benefit from our advanced level of instruction."

Providing the training for Rise Air's program is a good fit for Mitchinson, he adds, especially considering

the company's owners got their own start flying in northern Saskatchewan and working for some of the founding companies that now make up Rise Air. "We felt this was a way to give back to these communities and companies that helped us start our careers. There is also an under-representation of Indigenous pilots in Canada, and we hope this program helps to encourage First Nations students to get into aviation."



Mr. Jim Lemaigre, MLA.

Rise Air shares these hopes for its program. And to promote more Indigenous pilots, it has committed to offering graduates a position as First Officer with Rise Air, gaining a rewarding career within their community and expanding Rise Air's talent roster.

The Dziret'ái Pilot Training Program's first class will be put to the test over the next two years, both in class and the cockpit.

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“We’re in the middle of a global pilot shortage, so this program allows us to train pilots who have a love of the north and want to stay in the north,” says Young-McLean. “It makes the most sense to us that these are the people that should be flying with us.”

PARTNERS IN TRAINING

The Dziret’ái Pilot Training Program is made possible through a network of training, funding and cultural support partners. They include the Mitchinson Flight Centre, Ya’thi Néné Lands and Resources (YNLR), Prince Albert Grand Council, Prairies Economic Development Canada (PrairiesCan), Government of Saskatchewan, Cameco Corporation, Orano Canada and SSR Mining.

“We are thrilled to launch the Dziret’ái Pilot Training Program, which reaffirms our commitment to partnerships and collaboration,” said Mary Denechezhe, YNLR Board Chair. “This program not only empowers our community members but also echoes our mission to foster sustainable development and opportunities in the Athabasca Basin. Together with our partners, we are creating pathways to success for Indigenous residents and women, ensuring they have the support and resources they need to thrive in the aviation industry.”

“Air travel is vital to northern communities, as it is to our operations,” adds Tim Gitzel, President and CEO of Cameco, one of the program’s biggest industry partners. “This program will provide critical training opportunities for northern residents and prepare them for a career that will serve their communities.”

This collaborative network has been set up to ensure each candidate receives wraparound support throughout their training journey. That support includes free transportation to and from Mitchinson Flight Centre’s headquarters in Saskatoon, apartment accommodations for the duration of the program, financial support to assist with living expenses and numerous cultural supports, such as access to Elders and Knowledge Keepers and invites to events like the FSIN Cultural Celebration and Powwow in 2025. Throughout the year, trainees will also be provided scheduled breaks and transportation to travel home for various events (e.g., pilgrimage, Christmas, winter carnivals, etc.).

Mayor Daniel Powder.



MAKING THE CUT

Over 100 applicants competed to become one of the Dziret’ái Pilot Training Program’s first 15 students. Each was required to submit their cover letter, resume, references, a criminal reference check and additional health and education documents. After careful deliberations, 15 were contacted with an offer to join the program’s inaugural class.



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“It’s been quite a rigorous process,” says Young-McLean. “It’s also been difficult to narrow it down, too. Every single application we received was phenomenal. They all told a story. I wish we could do this for every single person that applied.”

With the program’s first class now in session, Rise Air is excited to get its trainees in the air and work with partners to help them soar. And while graduation day is two years away, the airline is hopeful that both its students and the program will go the distance.

“I would love to see it continue,” says Young-McLean. “We’ll have to evaluate as we go through this and see where we are in two years, but if it’s successful, I don’t see any reason why not.”

With its eyes on the horizon, Young-McLean adds the airline is proud to get its workforce-building initiative



The Honourable Dan Vandal.

off the ground and see it begin to make an impact. “Everybody is thrilled. It’s been a long time coming, but we’re doing it thanks to all our partners coming together to make it happen.”

Learn more about the Dziret’ái Pilot Training Program at www.riseair.ca/dziretai-pilot-training-program.

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