



1200 18th Street NW
Washington DC 20036
951.491.9827
www.aerobridge.org

AERObridge receives NAA Public Benefit Flying Award

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For immediate release: AERObridge is extremely pleased to announce that we have been awarded the National Aeronautic Association's 2013 Public Benefit Flying Award for Outstanding Achievement in Public Benefit Flying.

The award was given "for creating a nationwide network of volunteer aircraft owners, operators, FBOs, and pilots willing to donate their time, effort, and funding for the alleviation of the suffering of those in need due to disaster or circumstance – all of which was put to use in their tremendous response in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy" according to NAA spokesperson Cassandra Bosco.

The Public Benefit Flying Awards were created in 2003 to recognize significant contributions by people and organizations who voluntarily put their aviation skills, talents, and equipment to use to the benefit of our Nation. They are the most important aviation awards of this nature in the United States.

"During our Sandy response, once AERObridge mobilized and began our notification process literally thousands of aviation professionals, as well as several aviation organizations and the general public stepped up to help those in need," explained AERObridge president and co-founder Marianne Stevenson. "People from all over the United States donated their time, aircraft, money, and hundreds of thousands of pounds of emergency supplies to help ease the suffering of those affected by Hurricane Sandy, and we will accept this award on their behalf."

"While there isn't space here to thank everyone involved, we'd like to express our gratitude in particular to those EAA chapters whose members flew dozens of missions throughout the northeast from their home bases to airports in New York and New Jersey," Stevenson said. "Additionally, FBOs in Rochester, NY and throughout the Carolinas volunteered their facilities as storage and staging areas, and their staffs worked for days at a time sorting supplies and loading them into volunteer aircraft. In the southwest – thanks to the efforts of Ken Casey and the AZ Business Aircraft Association, Cutter Aviation, Pinnacle Aviation and Stratosphere Fuels – more supplies than could be loaded onto available aircraft were gathered and stored, leading AERObridge to reach out to Penske Automotive Group, who donated a truck driven cross country, with over 8,000 pounds of clothing destined for New Jersey. In all, it was an effort that demonstrated, once again, the heart and soul of the aviation community and, as I said, we will accept the award on their behalf."

For more information on AERObridge and our ongoing humanitarian efforts, please visit our website at www.aerobridge.org or contact Marianne Stevenson at mstevenson@erobridge.org.

Editors note: Photographs of AERObridge missions available upon request; contact Alan Staats, Director of Media Relations, at astaats@erobridge.org or 602.790.2636.

AERObridge Hurricane Sandy Background:

Prior to the storm's arrival, AERObridge began contingency planning, contacting volunteers throughout the United States with access to aircraft and, if needed, ground vehicles, the latter of which became an important component of our response due to the overwhelming amounts of donated supplies. Once the storm struck and the magnitude of need became apparent, AERObridge formally activated its network of volunteers and calls went out through social media, email and telephone lists as well as established press contacts to call for specific donations (i.e., food, warm clothing, blankets, sleeping bags, batteries and flashlights, and bottled water, generator oil among them) as well as to identify and publicize pre-determined collection points for the public to bring their donations.

AERObridge activated to help coordinate General Aviation aircraft bringing in much needed supplies to the victims. During a two week period, over 95 aircraft flew to NJ and NY bringing in over 50,000 pounds of specifically requested donations. In combination with aircraft, we also coordinated trucking in over 70,000 pounds of vital donations. People sometimes ask how fast the donations get to the people and hope their efforts are worthwhile.

For instance, David H. flew a Baron G58 from Columbus, Ohio Tuesday into FRG filled with 105 Winter Jackets. They were picked up Wednesday morning and distributed before the storm. With smaller quantities, the donations are normally utilized more quickly. Michael M. flew a C210 filled with Cereal (provided by our friends at Feed the Children) from Elkhart IN to NJ. It was at the shelter in Tom's River the same day. 24 hours after a request for oil to run generators, our partner picked up oil.

During the 2 week response, we utilized air and ground transportation methods as well as connecting our ground distributors with our partners at Americares to provide local access to blankets, batteries and flashlights that were already in CT. Whether people want to help by driving or flying or connecting resources, we provide a route for people to contribute in the way that felt right for them.

Thanks to the leadership of Graeme S., Charley M, Jim M. and Greg S., the weekend AERObridge fly in (Nov. 9 - 11) was an immense success. Over 40 aircraft participated and demonstrated the professionalism and heart that is the very core of General Aviation. Everyone involved did an excellent job in a very busy environment with no safety issues.

Air Care Alliance allowed us, as members, to use their Compassion call sign which allowed priority handling by ATC. We are grateful to them. Also, Jeppesen donated their services. We especially appreciate our relationship with the Aviation Member Organizations, AOPA, EAA and NBAA who relayed to their membership our response efforts. US Airports in Rochester, NY and Million Air in Albany, NY were collection points for donations and Atlantic Aviation in Farmingdale, NY Ocean Air in Tom's River, NJ and the people at Eagle's Nest Airport in New Jersey were the locations we distributed through. The staff and management at all the airports and the FBO's were professional and went the extra mile to make the reception of donations a smooth process.

AERObridge coordinated vehicle delivery of targeted supplies as well as aviation delivery. Initially aircraft flew from Rochester to NJ to deliver supplies. When asking for the FBO's assistance as a collection site, we understood that the public would continue to give after the aircraft have departed so we arranged that all remaining donation and very heavy cargo would follow on via vehicle. We coordinated with Steve L. to drive his refurbished military transport truck all through the night so that the second wave of donations would be received while still critical. Alan Staats and his son Christopher drove a truck loaded with 7800 pounds of locally donated material all the way from Phoenix AZ, driving through the night to arrive in Barnegat, NJ when the need was still dire. The list of American heroes is too long to properly credit everyone who preformed amazing work.

A detailed local example of AERObridge's response.

In the Phoenix metropolitan area, AERObridge reached out to the Arizona Business Aircraft Association president Ken Casey, who in turn contacted both members of his organization as well as the directors of his employer, Pinnacle Aviation, and explored the availability of both airlift capabilities as well as drop off and short term storage space for donated goods. Casey was able to obtain space on several eastbound Citation X aircraft as well as permission from both Pinnacle Aviation's Scottsdale Airport offices and Cutter Aviation to store whatever was collected at their Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport facility. Once storage had been arranged, AERObridge's media director contacted local television stations and newspapers, giving live television interviews with Casey (at Cutter Aviation) to inform their audiences of our efforts and ways the public could help. Those interviews, broadcast on local Fox, CBS and NBC affiliates and two independent stations were run for three days, on three broadcasts per day and resulted in nearly 30 minutes of total airtime, including three spots on Fox News's national feed. Print media efforts garnered nearly 120 column inches with photos of loading efforts on the Cutter ramp, locally, as well.

The response, in the form of donations, to the media efforts quickly overwhelmed the space available on donated aircraft and during a teleconference it was decided that AERObridge and the AZBAA would seek donated ground transport. Casey and the AZBAA contacted representatives from one of their member companies, Penske Automotive Group, and initially asked for a truck at a reduced rate; Penske answered by donating the truck gratis. AZBAA, Pinnacle Aviation and Stratosphere Fuel Consortium, LLC then provided funding for fuel and Topher Property Development funded lodging and food expenses. Once the truck was loaded with 7,800 pounds of supplies, AERObridge director of media relations Alan Staats and his son Christopher drove the truck to Friendship Community Church in Barnegat, New Jersey in two and a half days.

In South Carolina, AERObridge Field Director of Emergency Services Greg Stidom put out the call to our volunteers (and neighbors) and within hours collection and dispersal efforts had begun and both aircraft and trucks were on their way north with supplies going to New York and New Jersey.

In terms of hard numbers it's fairly easy to quantify what AERObridge's volunteers accomplished during our response to Sandy; more than 120,000 pounds of blankets, clothing, food, water, medicine, batteries and equipment made its way to those in desperate need. Our efforts also taught the youth within the aviation community how they could actively help, rather than stand on the sidelines and watch everything unfold on television. Schools held collection drives, weighing and labeling each of the boxes for proper weight and balance. Little children as young as 6 helped their fathers load the planes, with full knowledge that, no matter how young or old a person might be they could be of tremendous help. What was more important, though, is what aviation helped to bring to the people affected by the hurricane: Hope. Hope and the knowledge that they weren't alone, that people thousands of miles away dropped everything and took the problem to task.

AERObridge's response to Superstorm Sandy was an example of what the aviation community in general and our volunteers in particular are capable of, something we've all proven time and again – In New Orleans, in Haiti, in Japan and in the Northeast. One of the most gratifying aspects of all this is that during our response each time we reached out and asked for something, whether it was from the owner of a 60 year old straight tailed Cessna 150 or this pilot of a brand new Citation X the answer was never "No."