



For Immediate Release

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Aviation Leaders Mary Miller and Pete Bunce to Receive the 2025 Donald D. Engen Aero Club Trophy for Aviation Excellence

Washington, DC – The Board of Governors of the Aero Club of Washington is pleased to announce that they will honor two aviation industry luminaries with the 2025 Donald D. Engen Aero Club Trophy for Aviation Excellence: Mary Miller, former Vice President, Industry and Government Affairs, Signature Aviation and Pete Bunce, former President and CEO, General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA). Both Miller and Bunce have recently retired from their long-held and distinguished positions dedicated to advocating for general and business aviation.

“In deciding whom to select for this prestigious honor this year, the Aero Club Board faced an enviable dilemma -- how to choose between two of the most respected, most accomplished, most admired, and most deserving members of the Washington aviation community in Mary Miller and Pete Bunce,” said Steve Morrissey, President of the Aero Club of Washington. “I’m pleased to announce that we did the only prudent thing under the circumstances and voted to award two Engen Trophies for Aviation Excellence for 2025. Congratulations to Mary and Pete, who each earned this recognition in their own right for their respective achievements over their distinguished careers.”

Established in 1993, the Engen Trophy is awarded for “a record of lifetime achievement; or a single event; or a series of acts by an individual; a team; or by a corporation or organization that reaffirms the Wright Brothers’ standard of excellence in aviation.” Previous recipients include Herb Kelleher, the STS-114 Discovery Shuttle Crew, Scott Crossfield, the Tuskegee Airmen, Linda Hall Daschle, and the 2024 recipient, Mark Baker. The permanent trophy resides in the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum.

In 1981 Mary Miller was hired as one of the first Customer Service Representatives at Butler Aviation, a fixed-base operation (FBO) at Washington National Airport (DCA). By the mid-1980s she was recognized by the Professional Pilot magazine survey as one of the top FBO customer service employees in the nation. By 1992 she had risen to number one. During these years “in the trenches” Mary shaped her attitude and work ethic that culminated in her responsibility as Signature Aviation’s VP for Industry and Government Affairs. In 2001, Aviation International News cited her as “defying the glass ceiling” prevalent in corporate aviation. But like the country at large, September 11, 2001 changed Mary’s trajectory.

In the aftermath of aviation’s darkest day, Mary became deeply involved in studying and refining flight operation security protocols to help restore general and business aviation’s access to DCA. She played a pivotal role in developing the Transportation Safety Administration’s Access Standard Safety Protocol program (now known throughout the industry as DASSP). Thanks to Mary’s relentless advocacy and unwavering commitment to restoring access to the country’s flagship airport, DCA reopened to general and business aviation in 2005, with Mary herself on the ramp, orange wands in hand, guiding in one of the first aircraft to land.

Though her decades of contributions to industry and government are well known to insiders, Mary has always preferred to work behind the scenes. Rather than seek the spotlight, she embraces a quiet but essential role as a trusted mediator and connector, serving both her company’s leadership and the broader aviation community with humility and purpose.

Name an organization, person, technology, or government function anywhere in the aviation sector and Mary would likely be able to provide some helpful resources to help otherwise disparate parties make a connection.

These qualities help explain why Mary's influence across the aviation industry runs so deep. As Signature Aviation grew into a global firm, she remained a steady, trusted voice for its executives and owners. Her insight is frequently sought to navigate complex operational and policy challenges with wide-reaching implications for Signature's customers and the broader ground handling sector. Even as her impact has grown, Mary continues to embrace her role as a quiet yet powerful force.

Mary's industry involvement is as profound as it is influential. She has been an active member and board leader in numerous aviation associations, including the Aero Club of Washington, NAA, NBAA, NATA, AAAE, GAMA, Women in Aviation International (WAI), and the TSA Aviation Security Advisory Committee. She played a pivotal role in the creation of the Greater Washington Business Aviation Association, fostering education, safety, and professional development across the industry. As longtime board member of the Greater Washington Aviation Open (GWAO), Mary has also helped raise more than \$2 million for aviation charities supporting veterans, medical transport, and disaster relief.

"Receiving the Donald D. Engen Aero Club Trophy for Aviation Excellence from the Aero Club of Washington is especially meaningful to me, having once served as a board member. In many ways, I grew up with the Aero Club and within the aviation community through its membership—it helped shape so much of my journey and involvement in the aviation space," said Mary Miller. "Over the course of more than four decades in this field, it has been an honor to help build bridges between people and programs. But the greatest blessing by far has been the relationships I've made along the way. I'm especially grateful for my Signature Aviation family and the many deep friendships I've formed over the years across the industry. High on that list is Pete Bunce. To receive this award alongside a luminary of Pete's stature is a true honor in and of itself."

Pete Bunce began his formal aviation career when he entered the U.S. Air Force in 1979. During his 26-year career, Colonel Bunce flew F-15s and A-10s, while commanding several large operational fighter units in combat. His last assignment before retiring from the Air Force in March 2005 was as the Director of the Congressional Budget and Appropriations Liaison.

In April 2005, Pete became President and CEO of GAMA, an international trade association which exists to foster and advance the general welfare, safety, interests, and activities of the global business and general aviation industry. This includes promoting a better understanding of general aviation manufacturing, maintenance, repair, and overhaul; the important role these industry segments play in economic growth and opportunity; and in serving the critical transportation needs of communities, companies, and individuals worldwide. Pete also established the Electric Propulsion and Innovation Committee at GAMA which focuses on fostering development of new innovations and technology including Advanced Air Mobility.

Under Pete's tenure, he led the organization through the 2008 economic crisis and responded to the crisis by organizing and instituting events and rallies to highlight and promote the importance of general aviation manufacturing. As part of his legislative affairs efforts Pete led GAMA during passage and implementation of the Small Airplane Revitalization Act, which modernized the certification standards and methods for small aircraft.

To encourage, inspire and attract future generations to the general aviation industry, Pete organized the GAMA Aviation Design Challenge. This valuable program promotes careers in aviation and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education in U.S. high schools through aviation-focused curriculum, which provides students with the opportunity to learn about the science of flight and the mechanics of creating aircraft. Since its inception in 2013, the Aviation Design Challenge has had over 600 teams participate, representing over 400 high schools from 48 states and Washington, D.C.

Never one to pass up an opportunity to promote aviation to the general public, Pete was the spark plug and principal organizer of the 2015 Arsenal of Democracy flyover in Washington, DC. Conceived and executed to recognize the 70th anniversary of V-E Day. Over 50 World War II aircraft flew through the most sensitive airspace in the world and over the National World War II Memorial as nearly 100,000 spectators watched.

Pete serves as a member of the FAA NextGen Advisory Committee, MITRE Corporation's Aviation Advisory Committee, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Advisory Council Aeronautics Committee, and the FAA Management Advisory Council. He has also served on the board of directors of the Recreational Aviation Foundation, the International Council of Airshows (ICAS), and the Veterans Airlift Command.

"I am truly honored to receive the Donald D. Engen Aero Club Trophy for Aviation Excellence from the Aero Club of Washington. Knowing that Admiral Engen's career spanned aviation combat in WWII, aircraft manufacturing, aviation safety and preservation of our aviation heritage, makes this recognition so very meaningful. My passion for aviation has deep roots and I have been extremely blessed to be able to advocate for such a great industry on a truly global basis. I would like to thank the incredible GAMA staff and our always supportive board of directors who helped me carry on the mission of strengthening general aviation and creating opportunities for future generations," said Pete Bunce. "What makes this award even more special is that my dear friend and staunch aviation advocate, Mary Miller, is also receiving her own Engen Trophy alongside me."

The Aero Club of Washington will present the Engen Trophy to Mary Miller and Pete Bunce at an upcoming Aero Club of Washington luncheon, with the date and location to be announced. For more information, please visit www.aeroclub.org.

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Background on the Aero Club of Washington

As an industry cornerstone, the Aero Club of Washington is dedicated to providing a forum for discussion of aviation and aerospace issues and achievements. Hosting hundreds of national and international aerospace leaders at its monthly luncheon meetings over the years, the Aero Club has fostered and promoted interest in the principles and development of aeronautics since 1909.