

Fast 5: Launching A Part 147 School During A Pandemic

Lindsay Bjerregaard August 12, 2021



Credit: Epic Flight Academy

Launching a new Part 147 training organization is no simple task—particularly right in the middle of a worldwide pandemic. Epic Flight Academy, which has been training future pilots from its campus in New Smyrna Beach, Florida for more than 20 years, decided to branch into aircraft mechanic training in late 2020. Aviation Week editor Lindsay Bjerregaard spoke with Tyren Wilson, Epic Flight Academy's business operations manager, about the company's decision to begin offering an aircraft mechanic training program and how COVID-19 has impacted its launch.

What led Epic Flight Academy to start an aircraft mechanic program?

Epic Flight Academy founder and CEO Danny Perna started his aviation career as an A&P mechanic. Danny said, "I would have never gotten into aviation as a profession without first becoming an aircraft mechanic, and I attribute a lot of the success of our flight

Tyren Wilson, business operations manager, Epic Flight Academy

program to my experiences as an A&P."

Twenty-two years after first starting the flight school, we feel it is a privilege to offer the aircraft mechanic program. We also feel the demand for aviation mechanics will only continue to grow as the demand for travel grows.

What it was like to launch a Part 147 during the COVID-19 pandemic and how has that situation affected your training operations?

We had already planned to open the 147 school before the pandemic; however, the pandemic did not delay our process.

The timing meant it was no fun. It was incredibly challenging to say the least. Originally, we had a major plan to work with area high schools, but because of COVID-19 we were unable to go into the schools.

Additionally, new students were initially hesitant to enroll because mechanic training is almost completely hands-on. Although we were able to offer online ground school to our flight students, no such option existed for mechanic students. Still, we did manage to start our first class in October 2020 with eight students. We adhered to strict protocols to ensure everyone's safety, with staff and students pulling together to make the best of a challenging situation. Epic follows all CDC and state of Florida regulations when it comes to social distancing and masks. We have our facilities cleaned and sanitized each night after hours.

What types of facilities and equipment does the program currently have for students to learn on?

Our mechanic training facility is 42,000 ft.2 in size. With an emphasis on hands-on instruction, we provide everything from general aviation combustion engines to turbine engines. Students spend a good portion on electrical circuits, including wiring diagrams and troubleshooting. This provides them with a strong foundation.

Most of the items we have for the students to work on were purchased by Epic. We do have three Bell 407 helicopters that were donated as well as a few aircraft propellers.

What type of interest have you seen from students for this program, and how does it match up with demand from the industry for qualified A&Ps?

The demand for new hires is extremely strong, with companies like [GE Aviation](#) offering \$64,000 as a starting salary and providing additional funding toward college courses. We are starting to see more and more interest from high school students and parents as they keep learning about opportunities from the industry.

We've held several open houses, and it's been great to see retired A&Ps bring their grandchildren in the hope of introducing them to a rewarding career. Since we also offer scholarships, we've seen an uptick in interest from young people who are looking for technical careers.

What are the near future growth plans for the aircraft mechanic training program? Are there plans to grow to larger class sizes as the program gains traction?

Absolutely. We are allowed to have a maximum of 25 students in each class per [FAA](#) requirements. We are also in talks with guidance counselors in area high schools to offer students a technical option for a career instead of the traditional college route.

Our next start date is Oct. 5. Currently, 11 people have enrolled in that class. We expect the number to increase once we are approved for VA funding, which we are expecting to occur in the next few days.

