

Endeavor Award Recipient—Merry Schroeder, Volunteer Lighthawk Pilot

Merry Schroeder has recognized that being a volunteer pilot means more than acting as an airborne taxi driver and walking away once the airplane is refueled and stashed in the hangar. She has actively helped in fundraising for LightHawk. She became a board member in 2007, only leaving when family health issues required more of her attention.

As she became more experienced with the challenges and nuances of the demands of conservation flying over remote areas — her flights have been primarily over the remote, rugged and mountainous terrains of New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, and California — she increasingly donated her time to mentor newer LightHawk pilots. (She has been willing to fly long distances from her home base in Santa Fe, NM.) In addition, she has been an enthusiastic champion of volunteer aviation, constantly engaging in outreach to recruit pilots for all types of VPOs. She has never hesitated to say yes when asked to speak about volunteer flying to an individual or a group.



Both LightHawk and Angel Flight staff have valued the time and attention that Merry puts into pre-flight planning, passenger preparation, safety briefings and putting safe flight and extraordinary customer service at the top of her priorities. Merry became an oft-requested pilot for many missions in the Southwest United States as her reputation grew. She's been more than “just” a volunteer — a mentor of VP peers, an ambassador on behalf of her VP organizations, a cheerleader for other women in aviation, a generous and consistent donor, and a willing volunteer whenever help was needed.

Merry's volunteer flights have been in her normally aspirated Cessna 210. She has almost 6,000 hours of flying time in a number of types of aircraft and holds commercial, instrument, and flight instructor ratings. When she started as a volunteer, she was immediately involved in flying into some of the most rugged and remote areas of the country — before GPS made finding the right mountain top or river valley easy.

“I feel strongly, as do other members of the VPO family, that Merry's inclusion of LightHawk and Angel Flight as part of her family for over 30 years, her flying and overall service to the missions of conservation aviation and medical transport flight, as well as multi-faceted support of volunteer flying to serve the public good makes her one of our most deserving nominees in memory.” – Terri Watson