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Retired Navy T-39 training jet continues service

PENSACOLA, Fla. -- Like many retired Navy veterans that have served decades on active duty only to return to serving their country in another role, one of the last T-39 Sabreliner jets to fly at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola will help instruct students at George Stone Technical Center (GSTC).

Instead of being flown to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base 'boneyard,' and languishing in the Arizona desert in lay-up, the airplane will become an integral part of the new Aviation Maintenance Program at GSTC.

"We are ecstatic about our partnership with the Navy and are very excited to get this jet," said T. J. Rollins, principal at George Stone. "It was flying just a few months ago training Navy navigators, so it's a fully-capable airplane for our new students to practice on as they work toward their certifications and licenses from the Federal Aviation Administration."

The Navy-GSTC partnership happened through a chance meeting with the Escambia County School District's Curriculum Coordinator for Workforce Education, Steve Harrell and a maintenance technician working at NAS.

"When I found out he worked on airplanes at the base, I mentioned that we were starting a new Aviation Maintenance Program at George Stone," said Harrell. "He mentioned that they were retiring all of the T-39s and that I should ask the Navy if we could have one for our new program."

John Appicelli, assistant officer in charge for the Chief of Naval Air Training detachment at NAS helped turn the suggestion into reality. He said that it was an unusual request, but it had merit.

"It took a lot of coordination between the Navy and government agencies, but we thought it was a great idea and would be well worth the effort," said Appicelli. "We started the process in February and it took until now to work out all the details, including moving the jet to the school. I'm glad to see that it's going to a good home and will continue to help launch aviation careers."

Whisler Aviation from Seward, Neb. handled the transport of the T-39 to GTSC. The wing and fuselage were separated at NAS, trucked to George Stone and reassembled at the school Oct. 20 with the help of a local crane service.

"The aircraft industry definitely needs qualified Airframe and Powerplant Mechanics as there is a shortage of A&Ps across America," said Greg Whisler, president of Whisler Aviation. "In addition to transporting planes, we also have a repair facility that maintains aircraft, and we are always in need of certified A&P mechanics."

According to Keith Boring, program manager for the Navy's Credentials Program Office, active-duty and reserve Navy and Marine Corps personnel will be eligible for funding for the certification testing portion of the Aviation Maintenance Program through the Navy's Credentialing Online Program (Navy COOL).

"We don't fund for the training portion of the program, as many active duty and reserve service members qualify as a result of their military schools and on-the-job training," said Boring. "Navy COOL does fund, however, for airframe, powerplant and combination testing for the necessary certification exams at qualified technical schools like George Stone."

According to Harrell and Rollins, the goal of the Aviation Maintenance Program is to help develop a local workforce that can fill the future aerospace jobs coming through VT Mobile Aerospace Engineering, Airbus, and other regional employers. The GTSC Aviation Maintenance Program is currently in the process of receiving FAA approval and certification and is scheduled to start the first class at GSTC in August of 2015.

For more information about Navy Credentialing Opportunities Online, visit COOL.navy.mil.

Additional information on the Naval Education and Training Command, visit the NETC website: <https://www.netc.navy.mil>.

Story by Ed Barker, Naval Education and Training Command Public Affairs

141020-N-PK678-032 - PENSACOLA, Fla. (Oct. 20, 2014) A retired T-39 Sabreliner training jet fuselage is lowered onto its wing at George Stone Technical Center in Pensacola, Fla. for use as part of their new Aviation Maintenance Program for students seeking a FAA Airframe and Powerplant certification. The aircraft was donated by the Navy following the retirement of all T-39 aircraft. (U.S. Navy Photo by Ed Barker/Released).