

Young pilot has an uplifting story

Now he helps dreams take flight

By Mary Pilon
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — Jamail Larkins seems like a normal 22-year-old. He attends college, tells jokes and hangs out with his friends.

But he's also a licensed pilot, an ambassador for the Federal Aviation Administration, one of the youngest acrobatic pilots in the USA and a motivational speaker for inner-city youngsters.

Years before most kids get their driver's licenses, Larkins was flying. At 12, he flew with the Young Eagles program (run by the Experimental Aircraft Association to introduce children to aviation), at 14 he soloed in Canada, and at 16 he soloed in the USA. That makes him one of the youngest and most accomplished pilots in the country, says FAA spokesman Greg Martin.

"There's no mistaking the passion that Jamail brings to flying, and that attracts a fresh level of energy to flying and careers in aviation developing in the next generation," Martin says.

Larkins says, "When I flew the first time, I fell in love, and I knew it was what I wanted to do forever."

And Larkins makes his love for aviation contagious. When he's not study-

ing aviation business at Embry-Riddle University in Daytona Beach, Fla., he's flying around the country speaking to young people about pursuing careers in aviation and following their dreams.

"You have the opportunity to achieve your dreams," Larkins told a crowd of 300 this month at A. Philip Randolph Campus High School in Harlem. "I never would have thought all of this was possible, but it is. Whatever your dream is, go out there and do it."

Larkins' "Dream Launch" speaking tour, financed by outside corporations, spans more than 20 cities and nearly 100 schools.

"It's very thought-provoking," says Emmanuel Harrison, 17, a senior at A. Philip Randolph who heard Larkins speak as part of the school's Black History Month celebration. "To see an African-American go against the odds at age 12 and establish himself in history is amazing. ... I'm encouraged to do that in my own work."

Born and raised in Augusta, Ga., Larkins financed most of his flying himself, sometimes washing planes and doing miscellaneous work at his local airport, and earned a full scholarship to Embry-Riddle.

"I don't really know what I'd be

doing right now if I hadn't started flying," Larkins says. "It's hard to imagine doing anything else."

Larkins isn't just familiar with the details of flying a plane; he also knows the aviation industry. One out of every four aerospace employees is set to retire in the next three years, he says; nearly 7,000 air-traffic controllers will retire in the next 10. In spite of recent airline layoffs, Larkins says, the aerospace industry faces many dramatic changes that will open doors for new workers.

"You're looking at a future rich with opportunities," Martin says. "It's not just flying these aircrafts; it's maintaining, designing and controlling these aircrafts, too."

As for what keeps Larkins energized, he points to friends, family and peers, and he recalls an unforgettable luncheon with Lee Archer, one of the Tuskegee Airmen who flew in the trail-blazing all-black World War II Army Air Corps unit.

"Hearing some of the stuff they went through and what they overcame, it's incredible," Larkins says. "When I think of that, I realize that you can overcome anything."

DISCUSSION

- ▶ What are some of 22-year-old Jamail Larkins' remarkable accomplishments?
- ▶ Why is it important to spark young people's interest in aviation?
- ▶ Why is the future of the aviation industry "rich with opportunities"?

ACTIVITY

Review the Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/oco), and identify one career in aviation that falls under each of the four categories given below (e.g., flying, maintenance, etc.). Briefly describe the career. Then, in the shaded areas, explain how that job relies on each of the other three you chose. In what way are pilots, even when flying solo, part of a team?

VOCABULARY

*acrobatic
aerospace
ambassador
aviation
trailblazing*

Flying	Careers in Aviation	Maintaining
Career: _____ Description:		Career: _____ Description:
Career: _____ Description:		Career: _____ Description:
Designing		Controlling