Mitch Mitchell

2020 Pathfinder Award Recipient in the Education & Operations Categories

MAJ. GEN. HAROLD “MITCH” Mitchell’s list of careers is long and his accomplishments are many. Among them: he has a decorated military career (US Marine and US Air Force) spanning 39 years, retiring at the rank of two-star general. Some of the positions Mitchell held during his distinguished career are Commander, 728th Airlift Squadron, McChord AFB, Washington; Vice Commander, 4th Air Force, March Air Reserve Base, California; and Deputy Inspector General of the Air Force, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, the Pentagon, Washington, D.C. Along the way he has earned the Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with three Oak Leaf Clusters, and many other military awards. Mitchell is also a Command Pilot, amassing more than 3,500 military flight hours.

Concurrently with Mitchell’s military career, he also enjoyed a very successful career as a commercial airline pilot. He began his airline career in 1981 with Continental Airlines. In 1983, he joined Alaska Airlines and spent the next 31 years flying for ‘The Eskimo’. Mitchell was a Captain in both the McDonnell Douglas MD-80 and the Boeing 737. He was also an instructor and a FAA-designated Check Airman.

As impressive as Mitchell’s accomplishments are, both military and civilian, it is his leadership and passion for youth education that will have the greatest impact and mark his legacy. In 2009, Mitchell led an effort to erect a statue of fallen astronaut Michael P. Anderson on the grounds of The Museum of Flight. The effort paid off and the statue was dedicated in June 2009. Sensing an opportunity to do more with the name and story of Michael P. Anderson, Mitchell, with the help of volunteers and Museum staff, hosted a few dozen youth for a day of fun and learning at the Museum. The event also included interacting with the inspiring special guest astronaut Dr. Bonnie Dunbar. This program in February 2010 marked the inaugural Michael P. Anderson Day. It was very clear that this was something special, and through the leadership of Mitch Mitchell it was only just beginning.

A natural leader, Mitchell knew that for the fledgling program to be successful a mission statement would have to be established to guide future actions, and the following was formed: “To leverage Astronaut Lt. Col. Michael P. Anderson’s legacy to inspire underserved children of Washington State, grades 6-8, to pursue and to realize their dreams through the pursuit of studies in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).” The target audience was disadvantaged children of color. From that day forward, the Michael P. Anderson Memorial Aerospace Program (MPA) at the Museum has grown from a single activity to a multi-event program over several days that has been fully integrated into the Museum’s own educational offerings.

Over the past 11 years, MPA has served 778 students (37% female), known as the Michael P. Anderson Scholars. These scholars come from 212 schools in 61 school districts across Washington state representing 69 cities. In 2020 alone, MPA Scholars participated in six STEM-focused events and received up to 25 hours of educational programming. Many of the MPA Scholars have gone on to pursue careers in STEM fields.

In addition to these significant contributions, Mitchell has served as a member of The Museum of Flight’s Board of Trustees, and has been a tireless advocate and supporter of the development of the Boeing Academy for STEM Learning, expanding opportunities for underserved youth in every educational program that the Museum offers.

Mitchell, a Marine and retired two-star general and airline captain, builds a genuine, heartfelt connection with students. Mitchell has a natural way with young people, always willing to give a special word or lend an ear. Over the years, hundreds of young people have looked up to Mitch Mitchell with admiration, respect and affection.

What Mitchell has done, after two careers of amazing accomplishments, is to find a way to positively impact the youth of Washington State: to challenge them, inspire them and provide opportunities where there previously were none. The beautiful thing about his work is that his impact will be felt for years to come. In the finest Pathfinder tradition, Mitch Mitchell has indeed made a significant contribution to the development of the aerospace industry.

Written by Alison Bailey, Associate Director of Development