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Bohlke International Airways Founder, William 'Bill' Bohlke Receives NATA Distinguished Service Award

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Bill and Tuddy Bohlke. By. BOHLKE INTERNATIONAL AIRWAYS

ST. CROIX — Captain William “Bill” Bohlke is the recipient of The National Air Transportation Association’s (NATA) Distinguished Service Award in recognition of his outstanding service and ongoing contributions to the industry, Bohlke International Airways has announced.

The award will be presented in Miami on November 3, 2022, at a luncheon held in conjunction with the NATA 2022 Aviation Business Conference.

“Captain Bohlke’s roots in developing and fostering aviation in the U.S. Virgin Islands run deep. A lifelong aviator, educator, and industry advocate, Bill has always leveraged his skills and resources to prioritize the safety, viability, and welfare of his community, demonstrating firsthand

the immense value of aviation businesses,” says NATA President and CEO Timothy Obitts.

According to the release, in January 2006, Bohlke retired from American Airlines with 38 years of service, ranking second in seniority of 12,000 pilots. However, his aviation career first began when he followed his father’s footsteps to the Caribbean at age 16 to help build the family aviation business founded in 1959. Later, Bohlke and his wife Ruth Ann (Tuddy) expanded the business through many stages: Virgin Islands Airways, Eastern Caribbean Air, and finally Bohlke International Airways, officially formed in 1984 in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In humble acceptance of this honor, Bohlke says, “Without my wife, Tuddy, working in the business for 47 years, I could never have accomplished what our company has done. I share this recognition from NATA with her.”

Today, Bohlke International Airways is an award-winning FBO, charter operator, and 145 repair station that successfully thrived through major hurricanes Hugo and Maria. His son, William R. (Billy), runs the day-to-day operations, with Bohlke acting in a business advisory role. The company is majority family-owned and operated, and has grown to more than 60 team members.

Bohlke wrote and certified the first and only FAA- and VA-approved flight schools in the Virgin Islands – allowing veterans from the Korean and Vietnam Wars to obtain their pilot licenses at 10 percent cost, with the federal government subsidizing the remaining 90 percent. Many of his students went on to successful aviation careers as captains for carriers including UPS, United, and Delta, according to the release.

As an FAA Flight Examiner from 1970-2017, Bohlke certified more than 1,000 pilots for private, commercial, instrument, multi-engine, flight instructor, airline transport, and type ratings.

Bohlke has served as the Federal Aviation Safety Counselor for the Virgin Islands, represented the industry during numerous aviation summer programs and academic career days, and was instrumental in starting the St. Croix chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen. He has also been an active participant in leading aviation groups, including NATA, where he served on the Board from 1986-1989; and the Quiet Birdman, where he served as Governor of the St. Croix Hangar. Bohlke is currently the President of The Grey Eagles, an organization serving senior and retired American Airlines pilots, the release stated.

In addition to NATA’s 2022 Distinguished Service Award, Bohlke has received the 2018 Pegasus Award for Aviation Lifetime Achievement in the Caribbean, the 2013 Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award for 50 years of accident-free flying, the 2009 St. Croix Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Award, and the 2002 Spirit of American Award in recognition of outstanding contribution to American Airlines Flight Operations, according to Bohlke International Airways.