Kindling Lifelong Dreams to Fly

By: Dylan Frederick, Friends of Aurora Airport

The pilots who command aircraft like Chinooks for the United States military have a fire burning in them that sets them apart from the civilians they protect. In at least one case, that flame was lit and kindled while sweeping hangars at our very own Aurora State Airport.

As a boy in Canby, Oregon, Josh Link remembers playing with toy airplanes and daydreaming about how cool it would be to be up in the sky. He didn’t know at that time how far his childhood dream would take him — to a job at the Aurora State Airport, eventually enlisting in the U.S. Army, becoming a Warrant Officer 1, and then undergoing flight training to be among a prestigious and highly trained class of pilots commanding one of the legendary Chinook helicopters for our Armed Forces.

Josh grew up as the oldest of 5. He graduated from Canby High School in 2010. Upon graduating from high school, he enrolled in Clackamas Community College and got a job sweeping floors and cleaning planes for Management West at the Aurora State Airport. It was at the airport where his childhood love for aviation was rekindled and a new path emerged before him – one that would place him in the cockpit of an American military icon.

Pilot and mechanic for Management West at the Aurora Airport, Ken Mauser would take Josh up to in one of the planes every once in a while, as a routine maintenance check to fly a couple of patterns to make sure everything was running smoothly. Something clicked and Josh knew he belonged in the skies. However, he needed a final push to get there.

Feeling aimless at school, Josh decided to join the Army as a Calvary Scout. It was during this period that a friend told him he could become a Warrant Officer and join the flight program. He was unsure, but an insistent Commander at Fort Lewis, Washington, told him, “you’re doing this.”

To fly airplanes in the Army, you must first start by flying helicopters. At the time, Josh had only had experience with planes. He remembers seeing a helicopter in the hangar of Aurora State Airport, but never saw himself flying one.

At the time, when he saw the helicopter it was as foreign as another language to the young man. But he persevered and before he knew it, he had moved from Texas to Fort Rucker, Alabama, to attend flight school. Josh would eventually master the unique language of helicopters and would even take control of one of the most iconic aircraft in the U.S. military, the Chinook Helicopter.

The Chinook has long been considered the “Transport Workhorse” of the U.S. Army since the 1960’s when it was originally fielded during the Vietnam War to offer heavy duty troop and supply
transportation. Josh says that ability to support the troops and the Army ground game is the very thing he is most excited about upon finishing his schooling.

Josh is still in the early stages of the Chinook training portion of his schooling at Fort Rucker. Since his training began in January of this year, he has learned about the science and mechanics behind helicopters. The foreign-looking aircraft has become more familiar. While it has not been easy, he says now he would prefer to fly a rotary-wing over a fixed-wing.

One of his favorite moments was at his very last check ride as part of this TH-67 course. As he finished his auto rotation, cutting the engine and touching back down to the runway, he saw the culmination of all his work. That’s when Josh knew – the kid who played with planes in his room was now a pilot.

“Even though I don’t have my wings yet, and I haven’t been certified, it was still absolutely one of the best feelings in the world.”

He is looking forward to the missions and work that is ahead of him. He plans to make a career of serving in the Army. While he doesn’t know yet exactly where he would like to end up, he does know he would like to keep flying for as long as possible.

While many pilots can point to a moment their passion for flying was kindled, Josh’s story demonstrates just how bright the future of aviation is. His journey to the cockpit of a Chinook helicopter was unique -- one that was filled with swept floors, sage mentors, and some help from the Aurora State Airport.