

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

» Getting to Know  
COPA Pilots



*Ivy McIver on the ramp in Durango, Colorado.*



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## Flying High: Ivy McIver's Journey at Cirrus

by Laurie Einstein Koszuta

**Ivy McIver didn't set out to become a role model in aviation.** But she has become one nonetheless. She has worked at Cirrus for more than two decades, which has culminated in her leadership of the SR series product line and a seat in the cockpit for the company's dramatic formation photo shoots. As her profile has grown, so has her impact, inspiring the next generation of pilots.

Aviation was never part of McIver's life growing up in Rhode Island. That changed when she was about 11 years old and watched the original *Top Gun*.



PHOTO: JOHN FAUST

“When I saw that movie,” she said, “I immediately set my sights on becoming a military fighter pilot. I thought it was the coolest thing ever. So, when I was old enough, I joined the Naval Sea Cadet Corps and became singularly focused on attending either the Naval Academy or the Air Force Academy.”

## Meaningful Start

As her interest in aviation intensified, McIver’s mother gifted her a discovery flight at Quonset State Airport (KOQU) in Rhode Island when she was a teenager.

“Interestingly,” she recalled, “I don’t remember much about the flight itself, but I have never forgotten the instructor: a red-haired woman who took me up in a Piper Tomahawk.”

At the time, McIver didn’t think much of it. Only later did she realize how meaningful it was that her first exposure to general aviation had been with a female pilot.

By high school, she was even more focused. But when she learned that at 5 feet, 2 inches tall, she fell short of the minimum height requirements that would disqualify her from being a military pilot, she was devastated.

“Since I couldn’t do that,” she said, “I pivoted and turned my sights on becoming an airline pilot. But my mother wanted me to have something to fall back on in case there came a time when I couldn’t fly.”

McIver took that advice to heart and enrolled at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), intending to study aeronautical engineering. Ultimately, she changed her major and graduated with a degree in computer science.

“When I graduated from college,” she said, “I moved to Chicago to work for an investment bank writing back-office software. Aviation was still on my mind, so within a month of arriving, I signed up for my first formal flying lesson at what was then Palwaukee Airport, now Chicago Executive (KPWK), in an early 1980s Piper Archer.”

## Moving On to Cirrus

She earned her private and instrument ratings relatively quick, still thinking she might one day pursue an airline career. As her software career developed, she realized that aviation did not have to be her profession to remain central to her life.

“I wanted it to be fun, so I would go airport hopping on Saturdays with my boyfriend,” she said. “We’d take my Piper Archer and mostly fly the \$100 hamburger trips.”

Around that time, she considered earning her commercial and flight instructor ratings simply as an excuse to fly more. But an unexpected conversation at the flight school changed the course of her future career.

“I was at the flight school one day,” she said, “and another pilot mentioned he was considering a career change into aircraft sales and had been talking with Cirrus Aircraft about a job. But it involved moving, which was something he didn’t want to do. I made some flippant comment,” she laughed, “and said, ‘Oh, that’s too bad; it sounds like a really cool career.’ That’s when he told me that he thought I’d be really good at that job and offered to introduce me to someone at Cirrus.”

McIver was intrigued but skeptical. “I told him that I didn’t think I was really qualified for that job.” However, Cirrus was looking less for career pilots who could sell airplanes and more for strong communicators and sales professionals who also happened to fly.

“I had several conversations with the company,” she said, “and left the door open. Then, in early 2006, Cirrus reached



◀◀ **The 8,000th Cirrus Aircraft Special Edition SR22T**, flown by Ivy McIver.

out and said they had a position open in Salt Lake City and asked if I would be interested. Salt Lake City is the mecca of mountain biking, which I love. So that sounded pretty great.” She accepted the role and joined Cirrus as a regional sales director. Nearly two decades later, she is still with the company.

Over the years, McIver has accumulated an impressive set of aviation credentials. She holds an ATP certificate along with float and tailwheel ratings, and she is one of the few formation-qualified pilots at Cirrus, often flying in the company’s high-profile formation photo shoots.

But what has become increasingly important to her is the idea of representation and relatability.

## Be Someone People Want to Help

McIver credits many mentors along the way, especially April Gafford, founder of JATO Aviation in California and a longtime leader in the Cirrus training community. One of the best pieces of advice from Gafford particularly stuck with her: “She once said, ‘Be someone people want to help.’”

McIver recalled: “When you’re doing something new or don’t feel qualified or confident, approach it with humility and enthusiasm. Be the kind of person whom people say, ‘I see something in you, and I want to help you succeed.’”

That philosophy shaped the way she approached leadership and later, aviation marketing. “I loved the product at Cirrus, and I loved the people,” she said. “When I first started, the other salespeople were incredibly supportive. They recognized I didn’t have a ton of experience and really took me under their wing.”

When she eventually moved from sales to marketing, she began asking simple questions. “Why can’t the woman be the pilot and the man be the copilot in the photo shoot? Why not show more women in the pilot seat?”

Her work also began focusing increasingly on safety, an issue she sees as central to the future of general aviation.

## Safety First

One initiative she is particularly proud of is Cirrus’s Embark program. This industry-leading safety initiative provides free

transition training for buyers of used Cirrus aircraft, similar to the training new aircraft buyers receive. The goal is to ensure pilots fully understand the aircraft and its safety systems, especially the Cirrus Airframe Parachute System (CAPS), before they begin flying regularly.

“The standard in aviation is perfection because aviation is very unforgiving,” she said. “The response from owners has been overwhelmingly positive. Many pilots who purchase used aircraft initially don’t expect to receive factory-supported training but later say the Embark experience significantly improved their skills and confidence.” She believes programs like Embark have made a meaningful difference. “I’m very confident in saying we’ve prevented accidents with this program,” she said.

Outside of aviation, McIver channels the same energy into outdoor adventure. She is an avid cyclist, both road and mountain, and an endurance runner who loves trail running. She is also known for flying with her husband and their bicycles packed into the airplane, combining two of their favorite pursuits.

Whether she’s flying to a trailhead or leading product strategy for one of the world’s most recognizable aircraft lines, McIver understands the broader impact of simply being visible in the cockpit.

“You don’t really think about flying an airplane until you see someone doing it,” she said. “Then suddenly you realize, oh, people do that.”

And sometimes, that realization is all it takes for the next pilot to begin. ⊕