

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

» Getting to Know
COPA Pilots



LAURIE EINSTEIN KOSZUTA has been a freelance writer for many years and along with her husband, John, now owns a Cirrus SR22. With John as the pilot-in-command and Laurie as the partner, they regularly travel to see family, visit friends and enjoy our beautiful country. You can read more of Laurie's work on her website: www.laurieeinsteinkoszuta.com.

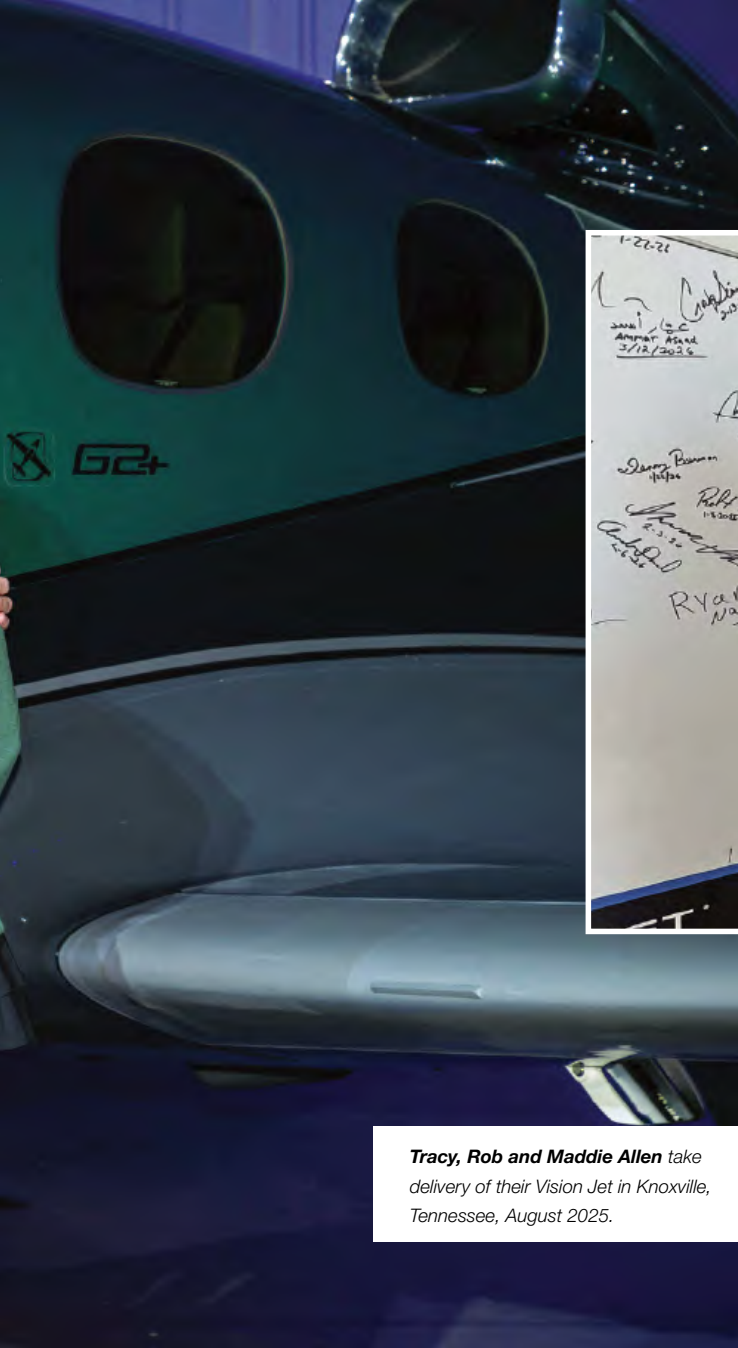


A Father, a Daughter and a Shared Sky

Rob Allen waited decades to become a pilot. His daughter, Maddie, earned her private certificate, instrument rating and Vision Jet type rating before high school graduation.

by Laurie Einstein Koszuta

When Maddie Allen started her senior year at St. Paul VI Catholic High School in Virginia during the fall of 2025, she knew it would be demanding. Her schedule was filled with dual-enrollment college classes, honors classes and AP courses. In between all the homework, Maddie, who already had earned her private certificate



Tracy, Rob and Maddie Allen take delivery of their Vision Jet in Knoxville, Tennessee, August 2025.

➤ **Maddie signing the board** after completing her Vision Jet type rating.

at age 16, was working toward her instrument rating. But that wasn't all. With the family's Cirrus Vision Jet SF50 part of their flying life, she had also set another goal for herself: earning the SF50 type rating before graduation.

For a high school senior, it was an ambitious goal, but one that was attainable for Maddie, who had been around airplanes all her life.

Her own journey to becoming a pilot made for a tough year as she tried to balance flight lessons and schoolwork. Maddie completed her instrument training in January 2026, halfway through her senior year and about a month after she turned 18. Through it all, she kept her focus on the Vision Jet. In March 2026, three months before graduation, she completed the

Cirrus Vision Jet type rating course in Knoxville, Tennessee, and became the youngest female pilot to do so.

For Maddie, those achievements were more than aviation milestones; they were part of her family legacy. Her father, Rob, holds the same ratings and more, but his path into the cockpit began much later.

A Dream Postponed

Rob had always loved airplanes. As a boy, he and his childhood best friend were fascinated whenever planes flew overhead. They often imagined themselves as pilots at the controls in the cockpit.

"We frequently talked about becoming pilots and maybe even joining the military and learning to fly," Rob said. "When we were old enough to make that decision, my friend did join the military and trained to be a Harrier pilot. I was intent on following a similar path, but because my eyesight wasn't good enough to fly for the military, it wasn't an option for me. Plus, my parents were opposed to the idea."



⏮ **Maddie Allen**, from tiny steps to big dreams.

“I’m very proud to say that I’m the youngest female pilot ever to complete the course.”

Instead, Rob went to school to become a medical optometrist, specializing in glaucoma and cornea conditions. Though retired now from clinical practice, his demanding career took precedence for many years and he put aside any serious thoughts of learning to fly. But the desire to be up in the air never really left his mind.

Ground School Changed Everything

When he was 41, his wife, Tracy, decided to sign him up for ground school near their home at Leesburg Executive Airport (KJYO) in Virginia, hoping the experience might push him closer to making his lifelong dream a reality.

“I loved it and wanted to do more,” Rob said. “In fact, after my first ground school class, I asked my instructor what his plans were for the evening.”

The instructor shrugged his shoulders and said he was going home. Even though it was 8 p.m. Rob had another idea. He asked the instructor if he would be willing to take him flying. After some persuasion, the instructor agreed.

“There had been a big snowstorm in recent days, and it was January in Virginia,” Rob said. “But even with the snow on the ground, there was a full moon and it looked like daylight; you could see everything. It probably wasn’t the smartest thing to do, but it was amazing.”

From that point on, Rob was fully committed. “I really wanted to learn to fly,” he said, “My clinical and business schedule was very demanding, but I still managed to find time for flight lessons and earned my private certificate in six months. When I wasn’t working, I was flying, which meant I had zero time for anything else.”

Building an Aviation Life

After earning his private pilot certificate in 2011, Rob immediately began working on his instrument rating, which he completed six months later.

During his initial training, Rob rented airplanes, but the high cost and limited availability led him to purchase a Cessna 182. “It was great,” he said, “because the plane was always there whenever I wanted to fly. I’m really goal-oriented and earned



⏮ **Maddie** as pilot-in-command.

my commercial certificate four months after I got my instrument rating and eight months later, I received my multi-engine rating.”

Since that first Cessna 182, Rob has owned more than half a dozen aircraft. “I was so fortunate to own those planes,” he said. “After the 182, I got a Bonanza, which I sold about two years later and purchased a Cessna 310. I tended to own a plane for a couple of years before upgrading. After the 310, I bought a pressurized Cessna 414A and then later moved into a turboprop.”

Rob had also co-owned a Cirrus SR20 G3 with other pilots, which was sold in 2015. Although he was familiar with earlier Cirrus aircraft, he had largely ruled out returning to the brand. “At the time, the Cirrus didn’t have the capabilities I needed,” he said. “The turboprop made more sense for what I was doing in my business.”

Finding His Way Back to Cirrus

That changed after a chance conversation at a car show in 2024 with a young man who shared Rob’s interests in airplanes and cars. The young man turned out to be a Cirrus sales representative and the conversation renewed Rob’s curiosity about Cirrus and the Vision Jet, in particular.

Not long after, Rob attended EAA AirVenture 2024 in Oshkosh and decided to take another look. “I ended up getting a VIP pass to go into the owners’ area at the Cirrus Pavilion,” Rob said. “In addition to enjoying the coffee and air conditioning, I decided to learn all I could about the updates to the Vision Jet since I had last looked at it in 2017.”

The result of those conversations was a plan to schedule a demo flight after Oshkosh.

A few weeks later, Rob was at a remote airport with his turbo-prop when maintenance issues forced the aircraft to remain grounded. “I said, ‘I’m done. I’m tired of this,’” he explained. “The inconvenience and expense of dealing with the breakdown at a remote airport and other maintenance issues helped me decide to pursue the demo flight.” The demo flight convinced Rob to put his name on the list for a new Vision Jet.

While at Oshkosh in 2025, Rob was offered a special edition SR22T G7+. “Since Maddie was flying,” he explained, “I wanted her to fly the safest airplane out there and I said yes to purchasing it; we took delivery in December 2025. Maddie and I both fly the SR22T,” he said. “It’s a great airplane. For most business trips, I fly the Vision Jet, but if we need a flexible all-purpose shorter-haul airplane for business, lunch flights, taking in scenery, practicing approaches and relaxed flying, we fly the SR22T.”

Rob’s aviation story started as a dream that was deferred until he was an adult. For Maddie, aviation was always part of the world she grew up in.

“When I was little,” said Maddie, “I was fascinated by how small everything looked from the air, but I didn’t have much interest in learning to fly.” As she got older, that changed, and she was inspired by the volunteer animal rescue and medevac-type flights that her father flew.

“Being a pilot is such a unique way to help your community,” Maddie said. “I occasionally went along with my dad on those flights and sat in the back to keep the animals company. We even adopted a kitten from one of those flights.”

From Steam Gauges to Glass

Maddie started her flight training for her private certificate in a Cessna 172. “I transitioned to the new Cirrus SR22T G7+ my dad owned for my instrument rating,” she said. “Going from steam gauges to Garmin avionics was intimidating at first because the preflight, buttons and switches were so different and unfamiliar. Once I did it, though, I would never go back.”

To help prepare for the advanced avionics and systems in the G7+ platform, Maddie also spent time training on her father’s Vision Jet simulator in the family’s garage. It gave her more familiarity with jet-style procedures before beginning her formal Vision Jet training in Knoxville.



➤ **Maddie with Rob** after completing her Vision Jet training.

Two Weeks in Knoxville

"I had to take two weeks off from school to go to Knoxville," Maddie said. "But my teachers were excited and very supportive. Every day after training ended and, on the weekend, I worked on my homework, so I was able to get back to school with much less late work."

The Vision Jet type-training course is an intensive two-week program that includes ground school and full-motion Level D simulator training. Maddie was surrounded in class by older, more experienced pilots, many of whom had more than 1,500 hours of flight time.

The simulator, Maddie noted, was unlike anything she had experienced before because it creates the physical sensations pilots have to learn to manage in instrument conditions.

"I can't say the experience was easy and I definitely was holding my breath until the very end of my five-hour check ride," she said. "But I'm very proud to say that I'm the youngest female pilot ever to complete the course."

Even with all she has accomplished, Maddie understands her limits as a new pilot.

"I don't fly solo often beyond what was required for training," she said. "As a new pilot, I prefer to fly with someone in the right seat. Since I completed my Vision Jet training in the simulator, I haven't acted as pilot-in-command in the aircraft

yet. I am waiting to complete my supervised operating experience (SOE)."

Some of Maddie's most memorable aviation moments have come during her training in the SR22T. On a night flight into the Washington, D.C., area, she landed at an unfamiliar airport and received a perfect 100 landing score on the Cirrus IQ app.

Proud Dad

For Rob, watching Maddie develop as a pilot has brought his own aviation journey full circle. Aviation, once a dream he had to postpone, has become a personal passion and a way to bond with his daughter.

In the fall, Maddie will be attending Auburn University, where she will study business. She still hopes aviation will be part of her future, possibly as an airline pilot.

Rob is especially interested in helping Maddie connect with accomplished women in aviation, like those she met during the September 2025 COPA Migration at Amelia Island. "There aren't that many women in aviation compared to men," he said. "I want my daughter to have that camaraderie. I'm so proud of Maddie. She has shown incredible discipline, good judgment and determination, all things that aviation requires." ⊕