

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

The Ninety-Nines is 75 years old.

Oklahoma City, OK  
October 20, 2004

This Fall, an icon of aviation history, the world's oldest organization exclusively for women pilots, will celebrate its diamond anniversary.

After the conclusion of the September 1929 All-Women's Transcontinental Air Race, "The Powder Puff Derby," six women racers, Amelia Earhart, Ruth Nichols, Blanche Noyes, Phoebe Omlie, Gladys O'Donnell and Louise Thaden, gathered under the grandstand at the Cleveland, OH, airport and discussed forming an organization for women pilots. An organizational letter was sent to all 117 licensed women pilots on the "Department of Commerce list, giving each the privilege of becoming a charter member."

On November 2, 1929, twenty-six women gathered at Curtiss Airport, Valley Stream, New York. The weather wasn't favorable and most drove in or came by train. The first order of business was the selection of Neva Paris as temporary chairman, then the presentation of flowers to Viola Gentry, who was recovering from a crash following an endurance record attempt. The women conducted their business in a hangar above the din of a Curtiss Challenger engine running up as the work of the mechanics proceeded around them. Tea was served from a toolbox wagon on wheels.

Eligibility and purpose were quickly decided upon. Membership would be open to any woman with a pilot's license, and the purpose was "good fellowship, jobs, and a central office and files on women in aviation". Choosing a name was a little harder. Some offerings were The Climbing Vines, Noisy Birdwomen, Homing Pigeons and Gadflies. Amelia Earhart and Jean Davis Hoyt put a stop to the nonsense proposing the name be taken from the sum total of charter members. Dues were set at \$1 per year, and "further increase in membership would have no effect on changing the name." Thus the group was momentarily the 86s, then the 97s and finally the 99s.

The vision of the charter members was that the organization would be very loose, "neither strictly frivolous nor entirely serious" and that problems which arise in connection with women in aviation should be acted upon. The original constitution proposed to "assist women in aeronautical research, air racing events, acquisition of aerial experience, administration of aid through aerial means in times of emergency arising from fire, famine, flood, or war."

Opal Kunz became the Acting President until a formal election could be held. It wasn't until 1931 that Louise Thaden was elected president. Louise, however, felt that The 99s would benefit more by having the world-renown aviatrix Amelia Earhart as president, a position she held until 1933.

Seventy-five years later, The 99s boasts nearly 6000 members in 30 countries. Members represent personal, corporate, commercial, military and government aviation. The International Headquarters is located at Will Rogers World Airport in Oklahoma City, OK.

True to their intent “to assist women in...acquisition of aerial experience,” The Ninety-Nines formed a scholarship fund committee in 1936 with Amelia Earhart as chairman. After Amelia was lost, Ruth Nichols led a committee to establish a suitable memorial. The Amelia Earhart Memorial Scholarship Fund was created on April 7, 1940, in memory of Amelia’s unselfish interest and enthusiasm for all women in aviation. A single scholarship for \$125 was awarded in 1941. Since then, the Scholarship Fund has awarded more than 400 scholarships to 99s members in six countries in pursuit of certificates and ratings to further their careers. Members have earned Commercial, ATP, Flight Instructor and mechanic certificates, Instrument, multiengine, and type ratings, and aviation-related Bachelor and Masters degrees.

In 1978 the Scholarship Fund added a research scholar grant to provide a work environment in which established scholars and scientists can add to the world's knowledge of women in aviation and aerospace. Researchers have documented the history of woman's place in the development and furtherance of aviation and aerospace, the leadership role of women in aviation, and expanded knowledge in areas of specific differences faced by women in aviation as pilots, engineers, administrators, and in military aviation.

The 99s’ AE Scholarships are unique in that they provide the entire cost for completing the requested training or curriculum. In addition, members raised nearly all funds for these scholarships through activities like penny-a-pound rides, air rallies, and donations. In 2004, the scholarship fund achieved a milestone when it reached \$1 million. “With a million dollars and growing, The 99s will be providing women pilots with much-needed assistance for aviation education, flight training, and research in aviation and aerospace,” says Elaine Morrow, 99s President.

In 1984, The 99s was given ownership of the Amelia Earhart Birthplace in Atchison, KS. The home of Earhart’s grandparents, Amelia was born in the house on July 24, 1898. After extensive repair the Birthplace Museum was opened for limited visitation. The house, with original and period pieces, is now open daily and continues to be a major tourist attraction in Atchison.

The 99s also operates The 99s Museum of Women Pilots at its Oklahoma City headquarters. The 5-year-old museum showcases the many artifacts donated to the organization over the years. Major collections, in addition to Earhart, include Jerrie Cobb, one of the “Mercury 13” women subjected to astronaut testing by NASA in the 1960s; air racers Edna Gardner Whyte and Marion Jayne; and the WASPs. Exhibits celebrate women’s participation in aerobatics, air racing, military aviation, NASA, airlines, and international activities.

A new program of The 99s is the Professional Pilot Leadership Initiative (PPLI) designed to help highly motivated women accelerate their career advancement through one-on-one mentoring with women professional pilots and guided leadership activities in the aviation community.

Any woman pilot is eligible to join The 99s and take advantage of these programs. For membership information, contact 99s Headquarters at 800-994-1929, or visit the website, [www.ninety-nines.org](http://www.ninety-nines.org).

The 99s, founded in 1929 to provide networking and support to women pilots, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization under the United States Internal Revenue Code. Its unique name comes from the total number of women who joined the club as charter members. Of 117 licensed women pilots in the United States, 99 joined the organization.

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