

Wally Funk Heads to Space

Fulfilling a lifelong dream on New Shepard flight



July 2, 2021 – WAI congratulates Wally Funk, Lifetime WAI Member #26, for getting one step closer to fulfilling a lifelong mission to become an astronaut. This week, Blue Origin’s Jeff Bezos released a video on social media personally inviting Wally as an honored guest on New Shepard’s first human space flight on July 20. She will join Jeff Bezos, his brother Mark Bezos, and an unnamed auction winner on the flight.

Wally is a 1995 inductee to the WAI Pioneer Hall of Fame recognized for her many firsts throughout her career. She graduated first in her flight training class at Stephens College, and went on to excel in the flying curriculum at Oklahoma State University. At age 20, Wally was the first woman ever hired to flight instruct at Fort Still, Oklahoma. In the 1960s, she was one of 25 women chosen to undergo preliminary astronaut testing for a privately funded project called the Women in Space Program which tested female pilots for astronaut fitness. Later known as the “Mercury 13” – thirteen American women successfully underwent the same physiological and psychological screening tests as the male astronauts selected by NASA for Project Mercury, but they never flew to space. Wally was the youngest graduate of this program.

In 1971, she became the first female FAA inspector, and in 1973 became the first female in the FAA’s System Airworthiness Analysis Program. Wally moved on to the NTSB in 1974, where she became one of the Board’s first female air safety investigators. She has more than 19,000 hours and has taught 3,000 students how to fly.

Wally never lost sight of her dream of going to space. In 2012, she put money down to be one of the first people to fly into space via Virgin Galactic.

Last year, Wally, with the assistance of Sue Nelson, published her memoir in *Wally Funk’s Race for Space* sharing her extraordinary story as a female aviation pioneer.

“Wally is a cherished and longtime WAI member that loves to share her expertise and advice with our members, particularly at our annual conference where she has attended every one since 1989,” says Allison McKay, WAI CEO. “We can’t wait to hear her stories when she returns from her long-awaited space flight on July 20, as she truly is an inspiration to female aviators of all ages and backgrounds.”

[Here’s the moment](#) Jeff Bezos asked 82-year-old Wally Funk to join the first human flight on July 20 as his honored guest.

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Women in Aviation International is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to providing networking, mentoring and scholarship opportunities for women and men who are striving for challenging and fulfilling careers in the aviation and aerospace industries. For more information, contact WAI at waihq@wai.org or visit www.WAI.org.

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