

DREAM LAUNCHERS

Shawn Raker ('90, DB) and Jamail Larkins ('07, DB) are inspiring dreams of aviation in America's youth and helping secure the industry's future

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When you consider the similar paths they've chosen, it's hard to imagine that Shawn Raker ('90, DB) and Jamail Larkins ('07, DB) met by chance. Given their passion for aviation and their determination to inspire young people to pursue their dreams of flight, they seemed destined to become fast friends.

"Jamail and I get along very well because we believe in building a stronger industry, and we are both passionate about doing what needs to be done—to teach young people about opportunities in aviation," Raker says.

For both, building a stronger industry means inspiring more young professionals to make the leap to aviation. Through a bold coordination of promotional, business and nonprofit ventures, they're paving the way for the next generation to launch their aviation careers.



Jamail Larkins and Shawn Raker share a passion for spreading their love of aviation to the nation.



With his role as an aviation ambassador, Jamail Larkins ('07, DB) helps create a talent pool for the future.

“Embry-Riddle has a responsibility to stay on the leading edge of the industry and to provide high-quality graduates.” *—Shawn Raker*

FAST FRIENDS

Raker was flying jets for Delta Airlines when he first met Larkins, then a high school student. It was more than seven years ago, but already both were in the sights of Careers in Aviation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to exposing young individuals to aviation career opportunities. The nonprofit’s founders approached both separately to be part of the organization’s expansion.

“They [the founders] had already selected Jamail to be their national spokesperson when I volunteered as a fundraiser with them,” says Raker, who later became the president of Careers in Aviation when it became the nonprofit arm of his current company, Flight Training Services International (FTSI). “Jamail and I began working together, and our friendship grew as we launched new educational programs, planned speaking engagements and coordinated airshows.”

For Larkins, meeting Raker was a pivotal moment in his decision to attend Embry-Riddle. “I was a senior in high school when I met Shawn at Careers, and was debating very heavily about where I wanted to go for college. Shawn recommended Embry-Riddle to me and helped line up a campus visit and an interview with the

university president. I immediately fell in love with the atmosphere, the campus and the people, and I was offered the Presidential Scholarship. The rest is history.”

THE DREAM LAUNCH

Early on, Raker and Larkins quickly discovered they were on the same page when it came to reaching out to others in the name of aviation: Both were willing to think big.

The result was the Dream Launch Tour, a nationwide effort to promote aviation career opportunities to middle- and high-school students, sponsored by a partnership between Careers in Aviation and Embry-Riddle. To date, Larkins has met more than 100,000 young students on the tour, many of whom may not have considered aviation as a possibility before.

“We know there are other kids out there in situations similar to Shawn’s and mine,” Larkins says. “Like them, we didn’t grow up with the traditional pilot-family story, so we had to be creative to get our start in it. We want to give these young people a connection to the aviation world to turn their dreams into reality too.”

According to Raker, there's no better ambassador for aviation than Larkins. "Jamail is a phenomenal spokesperson for showing young people all of the available opportunities in the industry. He has been fortunate to have made a lot of great appearances and had a lot of exposure for the aviation programs we support."

Like the time Larkins appeared on *The Late Show with David Letterman*. Raker remembers traveling with him to rural New Jersey for the show's taping. "He asked me to be his crew chief and help take care of his aircraft while he was performing for the show. While he was on the big screen, I was working behind the scenes," Raker chuckles.

DOWN TO BUSINESS

While launching new programs to help spread the word about aviation-related careers, Raker and Larkins also got down to the business of aviation. As an Embry-Riddle alumnus and president of FTSI—a leading provider of civilian and military flight training and testing solutions—Raker was especially interested when he learned that Embry-Riddle was no longer developing its advanced civilian pilot training program, CAPT. He immediately seized the opportunity to acquire it as part of FTSI.

"I was attracted to the CAPT Program because I knew it was providing the necessary training for civilian flight training," Raker says. "I also saw the oncoming need for pilots around the world and knew CAPT would fit the domestic and international markets."

Larkins also recognized the opportunity with the CAPT Program. "I got involved with the program for a few reasons—the first was because I'd have the chance to work with Shawn. I also knew it had the foundation of Embry-Riddle's more than 80 years of experience and top training curriculums."

With Raker's years of experience in professional training and Larkins' ability to promote and raise awareness to the general aviation community, they closed the deal in about six months, making CAPT a subsidiary of FTSI.

PROVIDING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

In the same spirit of the Dream Launch Tour, Raker and Larkins also are inspiring others to pursue careers in aviation by helping provide them with the means to do it. In June 2007, they committed \$375,000 to establish the *Careers in Aviation Endowed Scholarship* at Embry-Riddle.

Their purpose for the endowed scholarship is twofold—to enable future generations of students to make their dreams a reality, and to meet the growing needs of the aviation industry.

"If we can provide more opportunities for more young people to achieve their dreams in the aviation industry, then I know we will make a positive impact in the industry," Larkins says.

As the aviation industry continues to expand globally, and with 25 percent of the workforce soon being eligible for retirement, it will become critical to find trained specialists to fill key positions. Raker and Larkins are

committed to helping institutions such as Embry-Riddle prepare to meet these growing industry needs.

"Embry-Riddle has a responsibility to stay on the leading edge of the industry and to provide high-quality graduates," Raker says. "We must have educated and trained people in all areas of the industry, and this scholarship will provide those opportunities."

As Chairman of the Board at Careers in Aviation, Larkins sees its growing partnership with Embry-Riddle as a vital step in creating a reliable pipeline of talent to the industry. "Embry-Riddle will play a critical role in filling that gap in the aviation and aerospace workforce to make sure there is qualified talent in all areas of the industry. That's why one of our biggest goals at Careers is to build our endowment support to help future Embry-Riddle students," he says.

Like all devoted alumni, Raker and Larkins never stray too far from their alma mater when talking about their mission. "Our efforts often point back to Embry-Riddle, as we help young people realize that a career in aviation is possible," Raker says. "That's why we established the endowed scholarship—to be sure everyone understands that education is an important piece in preserving this industry."



Shawn Raker's ('90, DB) enthusiasm for aviation is as contagious as his smile. As president of Careers in Aviation, he's helping to make sure the next generation is exposed to all of the amazing opportunities the industry has to offer.