

THE CHICAGO EGYPTIAN

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Legendary Tuskegee Airmen Inspire Two SIU Chicago Women of Aviation *Tammera Holmes, CEO of Aerostar* *Juisell Lewis, FAA Safety Assistant*

It was a day that will remain in Tammera Holmes' memory forever. She was one of many youngsters at Meigs Field Airport in downtown Chicago. The Chicago chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen offers free airplane rides to kids through the Young Eagles Program the second Saturday of each month.



This was 16-year-old Tammera's day.

"During my ride, the pilot asked me if I wanted to take control of the aircraft. I responded by saying, 'Absolutely,'" she says. "As we turned around, I remember seeing the Chicago skyline. At that point, I knew I could do this for the rest of my life."

It was a unique experience for Tammera, who says she had never been to an airfield. She subsequently encountered the Tuskegee Airmen who took her on this flight. The 2000 SIU Carbondale [aviation management](#) graduate had landed her first professional role as an aviation counselor for Landrum and Brown, Inc., the world's largest, privately-owned, full-service aviation consulting firm.

The firm was hosting an Open House and invited

the Tuskegee Airmen, one of whom was the man who introduced Tammera to the World of Aviation.

"He introduced himself to me and my response was, 'You are Ken Rapier – you gave me my Young Eagles flight when I was 16.' He couldn't believe it," Tammera says. "It's pretty cool that we re-connected in this fashion after all those years. We still maintain a great

relationship."

Ken Rapier's influence has spurred this SIU graduate's inspired commitment to the aviation industry. With Landrum and Brown, she served in a consulting capacity for various aspects of the aviation industry, including operations, environmental planning, business management, project administration, and agency coordination with various City, state and federal organizations. The **Country Club Hills** resident is now President and CEO of her own aviation consulting company, AeroStar Consulting Corporation.

"After being in a business management role for several years, I wanted to establish my own

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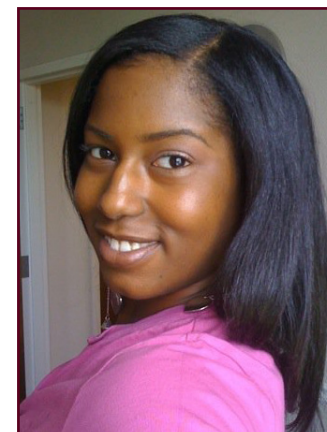
Much like good friend and fellow SIU aviation alumna Tammera Holmes, Juisell Lewis was inspired by America's first black military airmen.

The 2006 SIU [aviation management](#) graduate's church introduced her to the Organization of Black Airline Pilots during a conference in Chicago. The organization introduced her to the Tuskegee Airmen Chicago Dodo Chapter, which teamed with EAA sponsors to offer the Young Eagles Program the second Saturday of each month. Juisell, only 13, took her first small airplane ride around downtown Chicago with Aviation Historian Rufus A. Hunt, and shortly thereafter, made a decision.

"After hearing from the men and women at the conference, I immediately told my mother that 'this is what I wanted to do,'" she says.

The Chicago native traveled to Gary, Ind., and enrolled in a two-week flight training program over the course of three summers, called the Gary Flight Academy. The first summer was ground school and glider training, which confirmed her passion.

"Glanders got me hooked. If you can stomach flying a plane without an engine, you're going to



be OK," she says.

Juisell parlayed these early ventures into a successful career. In September, she accepted the role of aviation safety assistant with the Federal Aviation Administration at the O'Hare Flight Standards District Office in **Des Plaines**. Juisell assists safety inspection with technical issues such as pilot deviations, incidents involving aircraft/airline personnel and consumers, and regulation enforcement. She also manages

the flight members' crewmember data.

Juisell initially visited Southern during its annual United Airlines Career Day event, which presents minority students in Chicago with an opportunity to fly down to Carbondale. They experience first hand what their future could be like by touring the University and its first-rate aviation program.

"It confirmed that I picked the right school. SIU helped me along the road to this current position that will open the door to future opportunities, Juisell says. "SIU's aviation program was ranked in the top three in the country at the time I applied."

After two years on campus, Juisell's college

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Fulbright Scholarship Brings Joe Batir to Iceland

Recent geology graduate Joe Batir earned numerous awards while attending Southern, but he is most proud of an award he shared with two of his fellow students.

"I felt happiest when I was named to the [USA Today All-Academic Team](#) as an honorable mention. It was enjoyable because three of us at SIU were awarded that honor last year and we are all so different in our paths of study," Joe says. "I was happy that I could be part of a testament to how great and diverse SIU really is."

While this honor certainly made him proud, another award Batir received while at Southern was more life-changing. In April 2009, the **Channahon** native was awarded a [Fulbright Scholarship](#), allowing him to pursue a Master of Science degree in geothermal energy resources at the School of Renewable Energy Science in Akureyri, Iceland.

"Iceland produces a lot of geothermal energy, and it has great research facilities," Joe says. "The type of research done here can only be

done in a few places on Earth because the country sits right above the Mid-Atlantic Rift."

Joe is currently studying the basics of renewable energy, and will specialize in geothermal energy during his next trimester in Iceland. He plans to focus his work on geothermal resources.

"That entails everything from finding the resource through exploration, to producing the energy from hot water and monitoring the power plant and system," Joe says.

After studying geothermal energy in "one of the most ideal places on the planet," he hopes to take part in groundbreaking research by working with ISOR, Iceland's equivalent of the U.S. Geological Survey. ISOR is a leading provider of scientific and technical expertise to the geothermal industry in Iceland.

"I'd like to do geophysical modeling and possibly take part in the deep drilling project ISOR is conducting," Joe says. "They

essentially want to drill into a new phase of water in a super-critical zone and use that water to run turbines. We were told in class that it could increase geothermal energy potential tenfold."

Iceland's landscape is ideal for Joe's research, as well as volcanic eruptions. Although the April eruption of a volcano east of Reykjavik caused travel in Europe to grind to a halt due to the volcanic ash, interestingly enough, Joe says he wasn't affected by the eruption at all.

"When it first started to erupt and flights were cancelled for four days, there was no effect up here," Joe says. "Domestic flights were still flying. As far as I recall it was actually sunny that week."

As Joe begins to delve into the topic he is so passionate about, he is also attempting to adapt to a culture very different from the one he was accustomed to at Southern. On his Facebook page, he recently admitted to missing his truck, church and warm weather.



But on the bright side, he's enjoying Iceland's breathtaking landscape and the country's welcoming people.

"It's still cold, even though it's summer, but amazingly beautiful here. The people are great as well," Joe says. "Iceland is absolutely wonderful...almost as great as my time at SIU. If any fellow SIU alumni want to check it out for themselves, I always have room on my couch!"

Tammera Holmes

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company in an industry where there is a need for more minority and female professionals," she says. "There are advantages, in terms of governmental support, to being an entrepreneur who happens to be a minority and/or female. I just felt this was my time to do it."

Much like her mentors, Tammera is striving to blaze a trail for young people who follow her into the aviation industry. The SIU graduate is sharing her knowledge through the Aviation Academic Initiative (AAI), an initiative she developed to educate youth about the opportunities available in the aviation industry.

A primary reason for this concept is Tammera, who often returns to her native Maywood to visit with students, discovered that youngsters weren't knowledgeable about aviation. She is setting out to change that scenario.

"Consultants work with everybody in the industry. This made me realize the breadth of opportunities that are available. You don't necessarily need a background in aviation to serve in one of these roles," she says. "Young people want to see real-life examples of what's possible and we all have to do our part in making that happen."

Tammera's ultimate goal with AAI is to diversify the industry. She points out that less than one percent of today's pilots are African American.

Additional goals of AAI are providing creative academic tools for kids to enhance their learning on a higher level, and partnering with existing programs and organizations to develop aviation awareness.

"Students need to see successful people who look like them ... so they know what's possible," she says. "We are striving to train the next generation of aviation professionals in our backyard. It incorporates an aviation curriculum inside the classroom with learning opportunities from local companies and organizations, and attending universities like SIU where they can receive worthwhile internships that prepare them for the workforce."

An honor student at Southern, Tammera valued

her experience on campus, which she says prepared her for a successful career and aptitude to serve as a role model.

"SIU challenged me and I was able to make my own way as a student," she says. "The University offered a wide variety of opportunities for me to explore on an academic level. My senior year, I participated in the SIU Alumni Association's externship program at Midway International Airport in Chicago. I also did a mandatory internship at United Airlines which was one of the best things to launch my professional career."

"Through those experiences, I discovered how the airline industry operates and various roles of the staff. Attending SIU was undoubtedly one of the best decisions I've ever made."