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## **Eastern Iowa flight instructors hoping to get more people into aviation**

Travis Breese  
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IOWA CITY, Iowa (KWWL) - For Sam Berry, getting into flying was driven by military service.

"Grandfather was Army and Marines, fought in WWII. My dad fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, got out in 2008. And then I joined in 2015," Berry said.

Berry is a 2nd Lieutenant in the Iowa National Guard. He is a graduate of the University of Iowa and was in ROTC there. This coming Sunday, he heads to Alabama for the Black Hawk helicopter training school.

When he is done serving, he says he would consider flying commercially. The aviation industry is certainly hoping he does that.

The airline industry is in a pinch right now, dealing with staffing shortages created by the pandemic. The industry was brought to a halt in the spring of 2020 and has been slow to respond.

Older pilots who were close to retirement were bought out of their contracts because the airlines had no flights for them, others were furloughed. Since learning to fly is a long, expensive process, the replacements have not been readily available.

"It takes a lot of time when a pilot falls out of currency to get back current again. The airlines struggled for a long period of time to --even when they hired people-- to get them in, to get through class," Mark Wolford said, vice president of Jet Air, a charter service that operates out of the Iowa City Municipal Airport.

On Tuesday, people in the tri-state area saw the effects of the pilot shortage firsthand; American Airlines announced it is stopping all commercial flights to the Dubuque Regional Airport on Sept. 7. American has over 100 regional jets grounded right now because of staffing shortages.

Wolford hopes people realize it is a very good time to get into the industry.

"That's one good thing about this: word is finally getting out," Wolford said.

The salary for commercial and airline pilots is increasing.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median salary for airline pilots, copilots and engineers was \$202,180 in May of 2021.

Berry is just hoping that anyone who gets into flying does it for the right reasons and truly enjoys it.

"We don't want just like everyone becoming pilots. We want people who enjoy flying and take pride in what they do," Berry said.

## Tags

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Dubuque Regional Airport Sam Berry Mark Wolford Transports

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## Travis Breese

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