

Aviation Careers Lift Off in Franklin County with Tango Flight

In the coming 20 years, the U.S. aviation industry will require more than two million new skilled employees. With tourism and the military as key drivers, Florida is at the top of the list of states where aviation workers will be in growing demand – and not just in large communities.

Franklin County in Florida's Panhandle supports 1,210 students with one K-12 school and one K-8 school. The largest single industry in the rural community – oystering – was decimated by hurricanes in recent years, and community leaders are now more focused than ever on growing and diversifying the local economy.

"I've seen a real shift in the attitudes of the students we're impacting. They are great kids – they just needed some mentorship and a vision for their career paths."

George Wilkerson, Airport Operations and Economic Development Board Chair



Key to that growth is the Apalachicola Regional Airport and George Wilkerson, chair of airport operations and the local economic development board, who recognized the need to "home grow" a future workforce for the airport. He also knew that in the overall Panhandle region of the state, leaders project a need for 600 new aviation mechanics in the next four years.

From the education perspective, Franklin County School District and education foundation leaders were looking for ways to better engage high school students and broaden their horizons for employment.

Duke Energy serves 2 million customers in 35 Florida counties and is a committed partner in powering the vitality of each of those communities by investing in projects that enhance education opportunities, foster economic growth and encourage environmental sustainability. Through highlighting strong initiatives between local workforce partners, education foundations and school districts, Duke Energy hopes to spark more local partnerships that inspire students and strengthen economic prosperity throughout Florida.



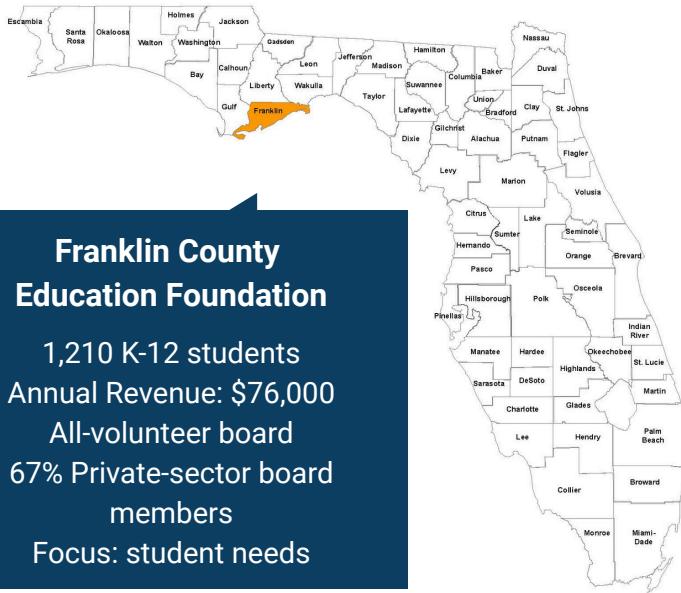
"I'm excited for my future now. I'm going to become an aircraft mechanic and make that my life's work."

Harley M, Franklin County School Senior

Enter Tango Flight – a program where students build an actual FAA certified airplane, applying classroom knowledge and developing fundamental technical and mechanical skills with the guidance of industry mentors. Through \$135,000 grant funds acquired via the Franklin County Education Foundation and other sources, a Vans RV-12iS two-seater plane kit and tools were purchased. As students work together to build the plane, they learn about aviation careers and progress toward earning their FAA general aviation maintenance technician certification.

Once basic assembly is complete, each plane is moved to the airport where Haney Technical College will soon provide opportunities on-site for motivated students to continue their certification path, building on their high school dual-enrollment credit to earn certifications in aviation airframe and powerplant mechanics.

As a national nonprofit partner with the curriculum and industry expertise, Tango Flight removes many capacity burdens from the small school district, including liability concerns. After planes are successfully built and inspected, they are sold and the revenue used to purchase a new plane kit and begin the two-year process again. Approximately \$15,000 in additional recurring costs will be required to sustain the program.



School District Education Foundation Matching Grant Program

Florida's local education foundations raise financial contributions and create local partnerships to help students have better learning experiences and be prepared for life after high school. The Consortium of Florida Education Foundations facilitates corporate support statewide and advocates for 1:1 matching funds from the State of Florida to increase the impact of local workforce partnerships like this one.

Contact info@cfef.net to get involved statewide or make a local connection.