



Alumna Spotlight - Robin Jones Shields '75

Robin Jones Shields '75 was recently promoted to the captain position on the American Airlines Boeing 777, which carries 247 passengers, a crew of 15 and weighs 648,000 pounds when full. Robin is now traveling to destinations in Asia, Europe, and South America. She has been flying as a pilot for American Airlines for nearly 28 years and has been a captain for more than 21 years.

Robin is certain that her education at Viz helped prepare her for this leadership role and gave her the confidence she needed to advance in her field. She was kind enough to share her experiences and how Visitation has played such an integral role in her life.

Robin, please tell us about your education and your career after you graduated from Visitation Academy.

After graduating from Viz in 1975, I went to the University of Missouri and learned to fly at a local airport while studying dietetics. While attending Mizzou, I put my name in a contest box at a shopping mall to win a free flying lesson. When I won, it lit a fire inside that eventually became a real passion. I spent many hours at that airport, working on various licenses and eventually, flight instructing. I continued

my bachelor's degree in dietetics but went right to the airport once I had my degree in-hand. I was a flight instructor for two years, flew charters out of Kansas City for two years, became a corporate pilot and then became a commuter airline pilot. American Airlines hired me in 1984 as one of just a handful of female pilots. Even today, the percentage of female airline pilots is low — approximately 2 to 3 percent.

How has Visitation impacted your life?

Visitation gave me the confidence I needed to pursue my passion for aviation. I had some great teachers who inspired me to always believe in myself and gave me the courage to do whatever I set my mind to. I always believed that Viz was not just a “college prep” school, but also a “life prep” school.

What advice would you give recent graduates?

I would tell Viz graduates to pursue their passion, no matter what it pays. I would remind them of the saying, “If you do what you love, then you never have to work a day in your life.” Even with the awesome amount of responsibility I have now — safely flying 247 people across the ocean — I still love my job, the view from above, the people I work with, and the passengers. I enjoy getting paid to see the world from 37,000 feet down to sea level. ■