

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## US Navy Diver Decided She Had the Skills to Build Space Stations

**NASA Astronaut and US Navy Veteran to Inspire Thousands of Female Future Leaders at World's Largest Aviation, Aerospace, Marine & Defence Diversity Outreach Event**



*Vancouver, BC- January 19, 2017 –* US Navy underwater ship-fixer turned NASA Astronaut Heide Stefanyshyn-Piper to inspire thousands of participants of all ages on March 11-12, 2017 at the Abbotsford International Airport.

Aside from NASA Mission Specialist and builder of space stations, Stefanyshyn-Piper is a 30-year veteran of the US Navy having served as Mechanical Engineer, Diver, Salvage Officer, Surface Warfare Officer and Commanding Officer with numerous awards and commendations to her credit.

Not your star-gazing, typical “*I always wanted to be an astronaut*” astronaut, Stefanyshyn-Piper discovered the space bug mid-US Navy career when she learned about NASA’s plans to build space station Freedom from another Navy colleague. Intrigued, she researched NASA’s plans for Freedom, a project which later evolved into the International Space Station, and concluded her experience fixing ships underwater for the US Navy was very similar to building a space station. She immediately applied.

During her 13 years with NASA, Stefanyshyn-Piper logged over 27 days and 15 hours in space. She flew on Mission STS-115 on space shuttle Atlantis with Canadian Astronaut Steven MacLean in 2006 and Mission STS-126 on space shuttle Endeavour in 2008. She completed 5 space walks totaling 33 hours and 42 minutes of Extra-Vehicular Activity (EVA) time.

**The Sky’s No Limit - Girls Fly Too!** is the world’s largest outreach initiative to inspire female future leaders in Aviation, Aerospace, Marine and Defence, and the free events held annually during the Week of International Women’s Day change lives. Events are fun, hands-on, and completely free to ensure there are no barriers to participation. This is thanks to the generous support of industry and community

partners such as the Abbotsford International Airport, Teck Construction, BCIT, Government of British Columbia; Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training and the University of the Fraser Valley. Events are open to the public and everyone is welcome (any age, any gender, any ability) – no registration is required to attend.

Aside from the thrill of meeting space travellers, free flights are offered to female first-time fliers of all ages to draw the females to the airport and pique their interest in further exploring the hands-on ground activities. As well, all participants (male and female) are encouraged to try their hand at many Aviation, Aerospace, Marine and Defence activities. Participants can expect to see aircraft and tactical assets from The Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Canadian Air Force, Canadian Army, Canadian Coast Guard, RCMP, Cadets, US Military, Civil Air Search & Rescue, plus civilian and education partners from Aviation, Aerospace, Marine and Defence. Visit [www.girlsfly2.ca](http://www.girlsfly2.ca) for more information and event updates.

Previous events have been supported by the Canadian Coast Guard, RCMP, Canadian Forces, Cadets, Canadian Space Agency, US Air Force, US Navy and other agency, industry and education partners. The Honourable Judith Guichon, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia; The Honourable Harjit Sajjan, Minister of National Defence, Canada; NASA Astronaut (Ret) Wendy Lawrence; Captain Joanne McNish, Director of Fleet Pacific Region CCG; Rear Admiral Gilles Couturier, RCN; US Consul General Lynne Platt and India Consul General Rajiv Chander were among the dignitaries present in 2016.

#### **Purpose:**

Out of 25,413 professional pilots in Canada, only 5.8% of them are women. Out of 17,278 aircraft engineers, only 2.3% of them are women. Women account for only 4% of the technical trades and less than 3% of the top command positions in the Canadian Forces.

From the numbers it would be tempting to conclude that women are either uninterested or unwelcome in these fields. Instead, studies have shown that a common perception persists that Aviation, Aerospace, Marine and Defence are industries reserved for men. From an early age, males and females alike are affected by this perception message, which is continually reinforced by observation (lack of change), media, social media and advertising. The low numbers also mean that most women have no direct family or peer connection to these target industries. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect gender and cultural diversity to resolve naturally in these fields.

**The Sky's No Limit – Girls Fly Too!** free outreach events and other initiatives aim to change this perception and awaken new interests by providing females of all ages with fun, interactive, and hands-on introductions into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) based fields.

**The Sky's No Limit – Girls Fly Too!** employs a unique hands-on approach to capture the interest and attention of the missing female demographic. *“From shop floor to top floor, we’re inspiring future leaders!”* says Kirsten Brazier, Founder.

Brazier is a professional pilot from the Lower Mainland, BC and she holds Airline Transport Ratings for both aeroplanes and helicopters. With 24 years of flying experience, Brazier has enjoyed a diverse career flying across Canada, US and the Caribbean on wheels, floats, skis and skids as well as two-crew operations in both aeroplanes and helicopters.

###