2005 Award Recipient

Stacey Cotton Bonasso ‘90

Stacey Bonasso, the drive and passion with which you embraced every challenge as an undergraduate have continued to propel you throughout your life and career. With a dream of becoming an astronaut, you joined the U.S. Air Force ROTC and majored in aeronautical engineering. Your academic performance and exceptional leadership abilities earned you numerous awards and recognition for excellence, including membership in three honor societies and a ranking as one of the top five Air Force ROTC cadets in the country.

Commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Air Force upon graduation from WPI, and with help from an impressive number of military and athletic scholarships, you pursued your dream of earning a master of science in aeronautics and astronautics at Stanford University.

While stationed at Griffiss Air Force Base in New York, you worked at Rome Laboratory as an aeronautical development engineer. During a summer internship at the USAF Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base, you became captivated with flying and applied for pilot training. Advanced to captain in 1994, you attended undergraduate pilot training at Columbus Air Force Base in Mississippi, where you earned your pilot's wings in 1995, together with two of four Top Gun awards for aviation and formation flying. You were only the third women in the country assigned to fly the F-15C fighter.

When a change of focus was in order, you served as deputy chief of public affairs at Columbus and chief of public affairs at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona, roles that enabled you to reach out to America's youth through educational programs and career days, and inspire them to seek careers in aeronautics and the military.

In 1998 you completed additional flight training at Randolph Air Force Base in Texas; the following year, you returned to Luke to complete your qualification training for the single-seat F-16 fighter. From there you became not only one of the first women assigned to fly the F-16, but the first woman to serve in the 4th Fighter Squadron, headquartered at Hill Air Force Base in Utah. After being reassigned to the 8th Air Force at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, you served as chief of fighter operations, 608th Combat Operations Squadron, before completing T-38 instructor pilot training at Randolph.

Now a major stationed at Vance Air Force Base in Oklahoma, you serve as a T-38 pilot-instructor, motivating, inspiring, and teaching students who have never flown a high-performance jet to navigate, fly in formation, perform aerobatics, and be ready to train in a combat aircraft.

Stacey Bonasso, your outstanding career has distinguished you among your peers. It is an honor for WPI to present you with the Ichabod Washburn Young Alumni Award for Professional Achievement.