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Get to Know SWIM Program Manager Kristin Cropf

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Kristin Cropf, SWIM Program Manager

From an early age, Kristin Cropf knew she was destined for a life in aviation. It was an intervention of fate that determined her trajectory.

Cropf's passion for the skies began when she was a child with dreams of traveling and becoming a pilot.

"I trained as a pilot during my senior year of high school and

eventually attended Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University," said Cropf, System Wide Information Management (SWIM) program manager. "I was well on my way to becoming a pilot, even going as far as getting my commercial multi-engine rating."

However, during her junior year, the 9/11 attacks rocked the aviation world. Cropf saw the path to becoming a pilot immediately out of college narrow significantly, yet she wanted to maintain her connection to aviation. While Cropf did continue her pilot studies, she also minored in Air Traffic Management (ATM), which would prove to become fruitful later in her career.

“Upon graduating, I started my career working in the DoD with a company that built, tested and deployed unmanned aerial vehicles. Over time, I became more and more interested in how the deployments linked with the programmatic side of the work and become involved in working with programs through the acquisition process,” she said.

The job eventually took Cropf from southern Maryland to Scottsdale and Yuma Arizona, and ultimately led her to Washington, D.C., working in the Pentagon. In 2008, she was ready for a change, and joined the FAA as a contractor supporting key National Airspace System (NAS) programs, such as Time Based Flow Management (TBFM), En Route Automation Modernization and the Traffic Flow Management System (TFMS). She has also supported NextGen ATM initiatives, including 4D Trajectory-Based Operations, concept development for Terminal Sequencing and Spacing, future flight planning through the International Civil Aviation Organization’s (ICAO) Flight and Flow for an Information Collaborative Environment, and Common Support Services–Flight Data.

Cropf became an FAA federal employee in October 2019 when she joined the TFMS program as Strategic Operations Lead, where she was faced with the challenge of addressing the integration gaps between TFMS, TBFM and Terminal Flight Data Manager. She was named SWIM Program Manager in May 2020, and has enjoyed forming numerous relationships despite having started the position in a virtual environment due to COVID-19.

“I believe that our team’s success is built on the trusted personal and professional relationships that we continue to cultivate throughout the FAA. Because SWIM touches so many different users, there are so many different people that our teams interact with. I am fascinated to learn more about the operational use of different systems and how airlines can improve their operations by getting the right information. I love being able to brainstorm with experts across our organization and in industry on how the future of SWIM can help these efforts. Even though I have not yet been able to meet my team in person, I cannot thank them enough for the knowledge and passion they share for the SWIM program.”

Cropf says that throughout her career, as a contractor and a federal employee, she has been focused on NAS operational systems in pre-implementation as well as deployment. “I’ve led engineering and operational concept teams in support of the FAA’s NextGen Organization in the exploration and validation of future ATM concepts. I was also able to support the FAA’s role in global harmonization as a technical advisor to the U.S. member for the ICAO ATM Requirements and Performance Panel.” She says being named the SWIM program manager has brought her career full circle. “In SWIM, I have the privilege of leading our [Program Management Organization] team to facilitate the development and implementation of several of the efforts that I worked on in NextGen,” said Cropf.

Despite the complexity of the SWIM program and challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Cropf states that she has embraced every test as an opportunity for growth.

“Great things never came from comfort zones — I was told years ago that the only way to grow is to put yourself in situations where you are uncomfortable. I feel like my career has been one uncomfortable position after another. And now, both the SWIM program and I are being asked to take a step out of our comfort zones, but that’s where the real opportunity lies to help improve the ATM system.”

Cropf lives in Lorton, Virginia, with her husband and 5-year-old son. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, amateur photography and spending time with family and friends. “So many playgrounds!” she concluded.

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