

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

LIATfeature-LIAT TURNING DREAMS TO REALITY

ST. JOHN'S, Antigua, April 06, 2010 – By the time she was 19 years old, Renée Edwards had already obtained her Private and Commercial Pilot License from the Durham Flight Centre & Centennial College in Canada.

But she returned to her homeland, Antigua, to teach music at a Kindergarten school. Teaching music, she would later reveal, was to occupy her time while she waited the opportunity to pursue her dream of becoming an engineer.

In 2007, the dream became a reality.

“My mom showed me an ad in the paper and I immediately said, I want to do this,” Renée recalled during a recent interview in Guyana where she has been studying for the past two years.

The “Scholarship in Aircraft Maintenance” advertisement was published in several Caribbean newspapers by the regional airline, LIAT.

Renée was the only female among the six successful applicants who were awarded full scholarships by LIAT, to pursue a three-year course in Aircraft Maintenance Engineering at the Art Williams & Harry Wendt Aeronautical Engineering School in Guyana.

The others are Dorian Nicholas, who is also from Antigua and Barbuda; Barbadians Brad Harper and Gerston Blenman and Kamal Welcome and Althesmour Black from St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Principal of the Art Williams & Harry Wendt Aeronautical Engineering School, Godfrey Rollins, has described their performance so far as “very satisfying”.

As part of the programme the students are involved in line maintenance with a domestic airline which operates out of the Ogle Airport in Georgetown as well as a larger carrier at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport.

Renée, who has been at the school since October 2007, says “it’s a good experience. I’ve learnt a lot since I’ve been here and I love it”.

She brushes aside comments that aircraft maintenance engineering is male dominated, saying “I look at it as a challenge and I love challenges.

"Sometimes you get hit down a couple notches...but that gives me the drive to do better, to go back at it and get it right," Renée said.

"I've been in love with engineering, engines, mechanical and that kind of stuff for a long while so this is not hard for me. Once you put your mind to certain things you can achieve it, that's what I have been doing and I love it," said Renee, who admits that the recent appointment of Guyanese Tesha Alexander, 28, as LIAT's first female engineer, has been a great motivation.

Renee is not alone in pursuing her dreams with LIAT.

Her Antiguan counterpart, Dorian recalls his bumpy start from St. John's to Georgetown.

When he arrived at LIAT's headquarters to submit his application, he said, he was informed that the deadline had already passed.

Someone else would have given up, but not Dorian. He submitted the application on a prayer that was answered a few days later when he was informed that a young lady from St. Vincent and the Grenadines who had been offered the scholarship was no longer able to take up the offer.

Soon after graduating from the Antigua State College, Dorian applied to a flight school in Canada and even though he was accepted he was forced to turn down the offer because of finances.

The LIAT offer was certainly an answer to all his financial problems.

"At the time I didn't have the finances the school required for the entire course. I was disappointed, but I decided that if I could not fly I would try and get into engineering," Dorian said, adding that the LIAT scholarship could not have come at a better time.

As he enters the final year of the three-year programme, Dorian said he and his colleagues were grateful for the support they have received from the regional airline.

"I would like very much to get the opportunity to go back and to give back to the company. They have pretty much given me something which is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. A lot of people want to be here (at this school) but can't be here so I consider myself extremely lucky where this is concerned.

"The initiative taken by LIAT is an excellent one. To get experience with aircraft, especially in the engineering field is by no means cheap. The education out there is expensive and for LIAT to say we are going to take six persons and train them is quite remarkable," Dorian added.

Vincentian, Althesmour Black said he had been contemplating a career in engineering when he came across the LIAT advertisement.

But just days before he took up the scholarship tragedy struck.

"About a week before I came to Guyana I lost my father. It was a case of should I go or should I stay home. In the end I decided to go because he was always pushing me into the engineering field. He actually knew that I got the scholarship and died about two days after I got the good news," Althesmour said.

Althesmour said that the death of his father has kept him going in Guyana for the past two years "because he was pushing me from (the time) I was a little boy coming up so...I am going to pursue this course and I'm going to finish it.

"LIAT did a marvelous job in giving me and the others an opportunity like this. It's an opportunity of a lifetime which for many is still only a dream. I am very grateful that LIAT stepped up and decided to give us the opportunity because quite frankly, I couldn't have afforded something like this so I'm very grateful," Althesmour added.

His compatriot Kamal said he had been reluctant at first to submit an application because of his age.

"The ad said applicants should be between the ages of 18 and 21 and I was about 23 then. The minimum requirement was five CXC subjects but I had four but with encouragement from my mom I applied," said Kamal, whose first love was medicine.

But he has not regretted making the switch. Since I've come into this field I've grown to appreciate and love it. Aviation is like running through my veins now".

The LIAT offer has also given him a different perspective on life.

"This has been a life-changing experience for all of us. It's more than a scholarship; we are learning how to co-exist with people from different backgrounds, different attitudes; how to manage your money; how to manage your home; your culinary skills improve; it basically does a lot for the overall development of a young person."

Brad had always been interested in planes and when he was shown the advertisement by his mother he "immediately went online and started the application process.

"I actually wanted to become a pilot," he would say later, adding that the three-year programme is no walk in the park.

But he has words of encouragement for other Caribbean young people contemplating a career in aircraft maintenance: "You have to know what you want, apply yourself and work towards it."

Gerston, his fellow Barbadian could not agree more.

"Do some research into the field before you get into it. Ask yourself if this is where you want to be for the next ten years of your life. This is one of those fields that if you go in with one foot only you are not going to make it. You have to go in with both feet and be prepared to stay for the long haul," Gerston said.

The six students are now pursuing their final year of studies that will be followed by the examination administered by the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) and the

Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority (ECCAA) in order to acquire their Aircraft Maintenance Engineering Licence.

-ENDS-

About LIAT

LIAT is one of the leading Caribbean airlines. It is owned by regional shareholders, with the major shareholders being the Governments of Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. More information about LIAT may be found at www.liat.com.

Media contact:

Desmond Brown, Corporate Communications Manager, LIAT (1974) Limited, Head Office, Sealey Building, Sir George Walter Highway, Antigua. Telephone: +268 480 5600 EXT 6222, fax: +268 480 5638 and email: brownd@liat.com.