

# Orange County Register: Dana Point Times

## Mother named pilot of the year

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Arlene Wilske stands in front of the Comair Canadair Regional Jet in 1996. COURTESY OF ARLENE WILSKE

BY MONIQUE BEALS / STAFF WRITER

### **About the Ninety-Nines organization**

In 1929, all 117 existing female pilots worldwide were invited to a meeting to form an organization to support and encourage one another.

Ninety-nine women attended, and the name of the group was born.

Amelia Earhart, served as the Ninety-Nines' first president.

Today, the Ninety-Nines have about 6,000 members and many chapters across the world.

Source: [oc99s.sws99s.org/new/](http://oc99s.sws99s.org/new/)

When Arlene Wilske first flew an airplane at 19, she didn't know her passion for flying would lead her to a career doing the thing she loved.

"It was just the most amazing thing," Wilske said. "There's a feeling of freedom. At the time, it was a little bit terrifying, but it was a confidence booster, too."

Since then, the Dana Point resident has flown more than 6,000 hours.

In college, Wilske waited tables to earn enough money to take flying lessons at the airport. She earned her private license at 21.

After graduating from Cal State Long Beach with a bachelor's degree in geography in 1989, Wilske decided to interview for a job in sales after a friend who worked for the same company told her how successful she had been in her own career.

"I was about to graduate from college and didn't want to be a college grad still waiting tables," Wilske said.

However, Wilske didn't like asking people for money, so that career path did not suit her well.

Wilske decided to attend flight school at Comair Aviation Academy in Sanford, Fla. After graduation, Wilske was hired by the school in 1994 and taught there as a flight instructor and later as assistant chief flight instructor before being hired by Comair airline. While with Comair airlines from 1995 through 2000, Wilske flew both an Embraer Brasilia plane and a Canadair Regional Jet. Wilske flew up and down the East Coast for 5 years until she had her first child.

"As much as I enjoyed flying, it was kind of a hard life," Wilske said. "I was gone 20 nights a month on average, and I just decided I wanted to stay home with them. So, I left aviation at that time, and stayed home for 10 years with my babies, but I missed it."

After 10 years at home, Wilske decided in 2011 that it was time for her to get back in the air.

The first thing she did was rejoin the Orange County Ninety-Nines, the local chapter of an international women pilots organization, and reach out to other pilots through their online forum.

One of the women who responded was Diane Myers, a retired Continental Airlines pilot, who helped Wilske back into the cockpit giving her every opportunity possible to fly.

"I wasn't sure what it was going to be like, because I had never taken the time off and come back like she did," Myers said. "I took her on a simulator, and she was very smooth and very organized. I just knew this was going to be good."

Wilske spent the next couple of years learning new technology and rules, and finally found her way to a job at the membership-based airline Surf Air which flies around California and allows her to get home in time to help her teenagers with their homework.

"When I left aviation I didn't imagine I would come back," Wilske said. "I thought that was it. I've had friends encourage me, and it was huge for me to come back after 10 years at home."

On June 17, Wilske was honored as Pilot of the Year by the Orange County Ninety-Nines.

A banquet was held at the Costa Mesa Country Club where members of the Ninety-Nines along with Wilske's family and friends came together to celebrate Wilske's career. Wilske received the award from last year's recipient Julie McCoy Schafer and Orange County Ninety-Nines Chairwoman Irene Engard.

"I think so highly of all of the Ninety-Nines and owe so much to them for getting me back here," Wilske said. "It is just the most amazing group of women."



Diane Myers helped SurfAir pilot Arlene Wilske, the Orange County Ninety-Nines Pilot of the Year, return to the cockpit



Arlene Wilske receives the Pilot of the Year award from last year's recipient Julie McCoy Schafer and OC Ninety-Nines Chairwoman Irene Engard



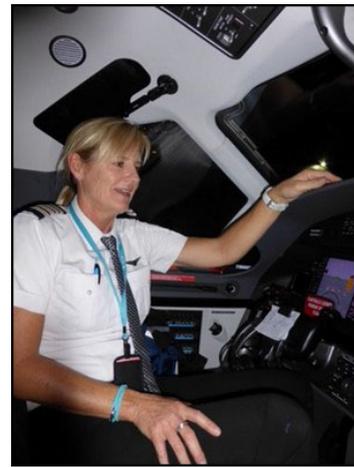
Arlene Wilske and her children Dana and Joe stand in front of a Cessna 172R in 2012



The Orange County Ninety-Nines on a fly-in to Santa Barbara airport in March, 2015



Arlene Wilske took her family on a SurfAir flight from Burbank to Santa Barbara in 2013



Arlene Wilske in the cockpit of the Pilatus PC-12



from the Orange County Ninety-Nines, June 2015

Arlene Wilske won the Pilot of the Year award