ALUM, EXPRESSJET VP TALKS FUTURE OF AVIATION

News / Airlines

For Brad Sheehan, senior vice president of operations for **ExpressJet** and a 1997 graduate of Auburn University, the **future of aviation** is promising.

Sheehan spoke to a group of Auburn students Thursday about current and future opportunities in aviation following several years of downturn in the industry.

“I got an invitation to come back and talk at the school that I spent four years and countless hours flying at. It’s the ability to pass forward and help these guys out on a path, the same one I walked,” Sheehan said. “For me, it’s a huge opportunity to meet the next generation of aviation professionals and do whatever I can do to help foster them on that path.”

Auburn boasts the longest continuous aviation management program in the country, Sheehan said. He added it’s rare to find an aviation program within a business school, like Auburn’s Harbert School of Business.

Professional flight management students are not only expected to take coursework required to

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become pilots from former Air Force and airline pilots. They're also enrolled in business courses that focus on subjects like transportation and supply chain management and business law.

Another benefit to hiring an Auburn grad, Sheehan said, is quality technological and interpersonal skills.

"I always talk about the statecraft and the tradecraft. It's the statecraft. How do they interface culture, values," he explained. "It's very easy to pick up on the people that are just in it for themselves and the fastest path forward. I like to look at people that want to learn, the fastest learners."

But there hasn't always been this much opportunity, Sheehan continued. The industry saw bankruptcies and very little growth in the 2,000s. But with baby boomers retiring in the coming years, airlines will pick up hiring.

"There are also 45,000 major airline pilots retiring in the next 15 years. There are only 13, 14,000 regional pilots," Sheehan said. "So there's a tremendous amount of opportunity, not just for pilots, but for technicians, for mechanics, for dispatchers, for aviation management grads. The airline industry has a lot of opportunity coming to it.

"It's very exciting. For these guys, there's so much out there."

Aviation technology is also bustling with the addition of new planes and unmanned aircraft.

Sheehan's enthusiasm at being back at his alma mater was palpable Thursday. And the crowd of aviation students was eager for one-on-one advice from a professional, especially in a career without a straightforward path to success.

"It's beneficial to meet somebody who's come through the same program, not necessarily flew the same airplanes, but was in the same buildings and took the same path that we want to take as far as being hired by an airline and being a pilot," said professional flight management sophomore Hampton McDonald.

Professional flight senior Nate Palmer agreed.

"Just the opportunity to meet someone that's higher up. We all want to be pilots, so any time we can get a networking opportunity with Mr. Sheehan," he said. "That's a big feeder out to Delta, the big boys. Anytime we get someone out here like that, we're going to drop our pens, whatever we're doing."

03 OCTOBER 2015

SOURCE: OANOW
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