



# AIR CANADA

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## Women flying high in non-traditional roles



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If the words “pilot” and “airplane mechanic” make you picture a man, you’re not alone — but you’re also wrong. As in other professional environments, women in aviation are increasingly taking on non-traditional roles in formerly male-dominated spaces. The powerful women working as captains, aircraft maintenance engineers, aircraft technicians and a host of other jobs are not only embracing these exciting positions, but breaking down stereotypes by excelling at them.

Take for example Francine MacNeil, an Air Canada station attendant with nearly two decades of experience working mostly on the “ramp” — airport lingo for the area where the aircraft are loaded and unloaded. She’s challenging perceptions every time someone asks about her job. “I get asked why I chose a career in a male-dominated environment,” she says. “And my reply each and every time is that I can’t imagine being in any other department. I’ve earned the respect from my male co-workers by showing I can hold my own and do this job safely and efficiently.”

Air Canada Captain Denise Walters has been flying for decades and says she’s increasingly seeing more women become pilots. “I was flying for 20 years before I had the opportunity to fly with another female pilot. It is a more frequent occurrence now as more women are considering aviation to be a viable career option.”

A big reason for more women choosing non-traditional positions is the encouragement of other women in similar roles. Knowing this, a group of women at Air Canada set out to create a committee designed to promote diversity and inclusiveness in the maintenance branch. The committee holds outreach events, including guest speakers and seminars, and organizes job shadowing opportunities for their members to highlight the many career paths available within maintenance. The committee has had great success, hosting 90 women at their most recent meeting.

At the end of the day, women performing typically male-centric labour is not just about confronting stereotypes — it’s also about challenging themselves. This is key for Saloni Handa, a licensed aircraft engineer. “I’ve always wanted to do something different. Being attracted to aircraft, I chose to become a licensed aircraft technician. It is a very exciting and challenging career. I love that I have the opportunity to push my limits and learn something new everyday.”

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

