

## History and Overview

Pilot, entrepreneur, and community leader Robin Petgrave possesses unstoppable enthusiasm for the power of flight, and in 1991, he parlayed that enthusiasm into an outreach program called “Positive Vibrations.” Robin, who is an FAA Certified Flight Instructor, landed a seven-seat Bell LongRanger helicopter on school grounds and delivered an on-site field trip for thousands of students. Using the excitement and metaphors of flight, he talked about how education is essential to being successful in life and to achieving one’s dreams. Teachers and administrators observed measurable change in student interest after these visits, and so they encouraged Robin to build on his commitment to youth.

The “Positive Vibrations” program continues today, but it is only one feature of Tomorrow’s Aeronautical Museum (TAM), a designated 501(c)(3) that occupies permanent space located directly on the Compton-Woodley Airport. Within a 7,000 square-foot facility, TAM conducts on-site informal STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) education programs that include afterschool activities with lesson plans taught by certified instructors; summer camps; internships; mentoring; tutoring; leadership training; field trips; and large events, such as open houses, community service days, and career summits.

Open to students and visitors 12 hours a day and seven days a week, the museum features aircraft and artifacts as well as photos that fill the wall and celebrate the Tuskegee Airmen and other historic leaders in aviation. The museum also includes classrooms and meeting space, dozens of computers, flight simulators, and a welcoming environment for students to be safe, supported and surrounded with positive and encouraging role models. Since TAM’s 1999 establishment as a nonprofit organization, volunteerism and sweat equity have transformed an empty, dilapidated structure into an airport-based museum space.

TAM’s non-profit flight school is the draw for many Compton youth, and in 14 years, 900 students between the ages of 8 and 21 have logged 4,500 in-flight student hours in TAM aircraft. Students earn that flight time in various ways: by working as interns; by completing community service projects; by mentoring younger students; by accepting opportunities for public speaking; by coming to TAM to complete their homework; and by excelling in school. Disguised learning is a key strategy used at TAM, and staff are committed to meeting students’ interests at all levels of readiness.

The Tuskegee Airmen who live in the Los Angeles area play a role in that disguised learning, as they regularly visit the museum to mentor students. In the process, lessons in leadership and history are handed down. The WW-II heroes also are celebrated by the flying students, as each plane in TAM’s red-tailed fleet has been signed by various representatives of the Tuskegee Airmen.

There are thousands of aviation-themed informal STEM programs in the U.S., but TAM is unique. TAM differentiates itself by three core philosophies – (1) start introducing the inspiration of flight at an early age (ideally before 3<sup>rd</sup> grade), (2) maximize out-of-school time, and (3) aggressively promote and support the most lofty and innovative goals.

*Hundreds of students representing under-served communities  
have transformed their lives by participating at  
Tomorrow’s Aeronautical Museum.*