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Outreach in Europe – (l to r) WAI European Section President Michele Bassenesi with German AOPA Membership Director Petra Schellhorn and AFW Editor Amy Laboda.

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JuAnne Puglisi, Lockheed Martin's training systems manager, and Pam Valdez, Boeing F/A-22 training system manager for The Boeing Company. Photo by Robert Wilson, Lockheed Martin

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Reaching Out

At the time, it seemed like a good idea.... Oh, if I could only count the moments I've run that phrase through my head just as the butterflies in my stomach were taking off because I'd stuck my feet deep in the muck of unknown terrain and was about to find out what I was "in for."

This time around the ditty scrolled across my mind's eye as I buckled up for a 10-hour trip from Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport in Texas to Frankfurt, Germany, where I'd been invited to speak to a group of pilots holding U.S. certificates who happened to also be

in what I later learned were the capable hands of flight instructor and expatriate Michael Nelson, who had invited me to speak at the events the summer before.

What I didn't know, I discovered, was what helped me. Nelson enlisted the aid of Goldline Aviation owner Ekkart Buke-



meyer, a member of Nelson's Aviation Discussion Group and also his erstwhile employer (Nelson taught ground school for Goldline) to provide us with not just an ideal location for our WAI meeting, but also public relations, advertising, and refreshments, soup-to-nuts style.

Over the course of six months Nelson and Buke-meyer, both avid supporters of WAI, arranged it all. The discussion group seminar was attended by no less

than 21 eager souls, primarily men, who were even happy to listen to a pitch to attend the WAI meeting, which was slipped in somewhere between the discussion on landing flares and rollouts.

With some help from Michelle Bassenesi, the organizer of the WAI European Chapter, we were able to bring together a former WAI scholarship winner working in Brussels and a fascinating cross-section of women working in aviation throughout Germany the next night. In the room were a lawyer with German Air Traffic Control, several Information Technologies specialists, a German Glider/Balloon flight instructor, a Lufthansa

flight attendant who was also a private pilot—it ran the gamut. And yes, there were even a few of the men from the aviation discussion group of the night before (one with his girlfriend, who is interested in flying).

By the time I stood up to speak, watching swirling snowflakes cruise by

Don't let distance or borders stop you from bringing WAI and its benefits to someone new.

the windows of our 27th floor conference room, I was as relaxed as ever. No butterflies—no parched throat—no worries. Sitting before me was a perfect mix of women and men from all walks of aviation and aerospace, even a few people who never really thought about their jobs as being a part of aviation, and they were interested in hearing what WAI could do to help them, and to help them get the word out about aviation careers, and the future. It was exactly why I came all that way, and it was, after all, a very good idea.



by Amy Laboda