

## MASTER PILOT EUGENE MAY 2019 GRANT

*“Nothing is handed to you on a silver platter. You’ve got to put some kind of effort in to get there.”  
Eugene May 2018*

**Description:** Master Pilot Eugene May Classroom Enrichment Grant for Jackson, TN (Madison County), sponsored by Taste of Aviation

**Amount:** \$700

**Deadline:** Due no later than midnight Central Time on March 31, 2019. Submission via email at [tasteofaviation@gmail.com](mailto:tasteofaviation@gmail.com)

Master Pilot, Eugene May was born on Valentine’s Day 1923 in Jackson, TN. While working in the cotton fields, he set a goal to fly an airplane and he went on to become one of the early black pilots when he earned his license in 1948. He still owns a 1951 Chrome Swift Globe airplane that he houses at Gibson County Airport. What is most striking about him is that he did not want to be a commercial pilot - he just wanted to fly! Eugene May is a leader who has demonstrated skills in **critical thinking, goal setting and financial literacy**. In 2017, the Memphis Blackhawks bestowed him with the lofty title of “Honorary Member.” Then in 2018, the Federal Aviation Administration recognized him as a “Master Pilot” with the support of the Memphis Blackhawks, the Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals, the Memphis Chapter National Black Coalition of Federal Aviation Employees, the Memphis Chapter Tuskegee Airmen, Project Altitude, Gibson County Airport, McKellar-Sipes Regional Airport, Dyer Foods, Lane College and Taste of Aviation.

In recognition of Master Pilot Eugene May’s position as a positive role model, this grant will be awarded to a practicing educator in the Jackson, TN (Madison County) area and their school to create a program to inspire students around similar life goals. The successful candidate must design a plan that shares his legacy as a leader and that fosters critical thinking, goal setting and financial literacy in students. The grant funding may be used for resource materials, supplies, equipment, programs, transportation and technology. Please keep in mind that any of the organizations mentioned above may be available to participate in your program.

This grant is sponsored by Taste of Aviation (TOA), a non-profit organization whose mission is to introduce youth and adults of all ages to the historical, social and career contributions of aviation. TOA utilizes an array of methods to engage the community, including Aviation / Aerospace career days; Book/web publications; Educational outreach; Strategic corporate and organizational partnerships and community events like Saturday Flight School. In addition to outreach events, TOA also provides scholarship opportunities in STREAM careers, and funding for special projects.

[www.tasteofaviation.org](http://www.tasteofaviation.org)



*“Keep Looking Up”*

## HOW TO APPLY

**Description:** Master Pilot Eugene May Classroom Enrichment Grant for Jackson, TN (Madison County) sponsored by Taste of Aviation

**Amount:** \$700

**Deadline:** Due no later than midnight Central Time on March 31, 2019. Submission via email at [tasteofaviation@gmail.com](mailto:tasteofaviation@gmail.com)

**Attached you will find additional information about Master Pilot Eugene May to help with your application and program development. Please ensure you submit all FOUR (4) parts of the application:**

### 1. Applicant Information

- Date of Application
- School Name, Principal's Name, Address, Phone Number, School Website
- Teacher Name, Address, Email, Phone Number

### 2. Proposal Summary - One paragraph that describes your proposed project, including

- Why you are requesting this grant for students at your school?
- Brief summary of the project or program you are proposing.
- How will the proposed project inspire students to similar life goals as Eugene May?

### 3. Funding Request - Detailed explanation of how the funds will be used

- Describe the students that will be served by this project.
- Describe the project proposal including goals, objectives, timeline for implementation, specific activities to be funded and outcomes expected
- List any additional key players for the project: names, titles, qualification and experience
- List any other organizations, if any, participating in the program or activity
- Evaluation – explain your expected results and how you will measure the effectiveness of your activities.

### 4. School Approval – Please attach an approval letter from your school principal on school letterhead agreeing to host the proposed activity if funded and to share event correspondence, pictures, videos and testimonies with Taste of Aviation.

***\*\*Winning school/educator will be notified via email no later than April 22, 2019. Grant will be made payable to winning school/educator.***

[www.tasteofaviation.org](http://www.tasteofaviation.org)



***"Keep Looking Up"***



*Fifty Years  
of Dedicated Service in  
Aviation Safety*

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

THE WRIGHT BROTHERS  
"MASTER PILOT" AWARD

*presented to*

***EUGENE MAY***

***AUGUST 4, 2018***

*In recognition of your contributions to building and  
maintaining the safest aviation system in the world,  
through practicing and promoting safe aircraft flight  
operations for 50 years.*

*Orville Wright*

*Wilbur Wright*

## MEMPHIS BLACKHAWKS DECLARATION



**Because**, the Memphis Blackhawks Aviation Association is an organization of professionals from various backgrounds who share a common interest in aviation and whose primary objective is to target underprivileged, urban, and inner-city youth that are in desperate need of clear direction and positive roles models in their lives; and

**Whereas**, Eugene May was born on February 14, 1923 in East Union, TN and in 1948 became one of the first black pilots from the Memphis, TN area; and

**Whereas**, Eugene May as a boy working in the cotton fields of Tennessee, would look up overhead and declare that he would one day fly one of those "aero" planes; and

**Whereas**, Eugene May, at the age of 17, was told that no one in the south would teach him to fly because of the color of his skin; and

**Whereas**, Eugene May was so determined to fly that he left Tennessee and went to Missouri, Indiana and finally to Illinois, where he trained to fly at the prestigious Cornelius Coffey School of Aeronautics under the wings of America's aerospace heroes Willa Brown and Cornelius Coffey; and

**Whereas**, Eugene May personally met and associated with other aviation greats like Chief Anderson, Walter Robinson, Rufus Hunt, Charles Smith, Vernon Brown, Bill Gass, and Janice Harmon Bragg; and

**Whereas**, Eugene May has also flown many types of aircraft including Bonanza, Cessna 182, Stearman Bi-Plane, Pitts, and Yankee; and

**Whereas**, Eugene May still owns the 1951 silver Swift Globe aircraft, N2453B, that he purchased in 1963 and has flown to various places including at least 10 times from California to New York; and

**Whereas**, Eugene May has taken friends, family members and anyone interested in becoming a pilot soaring in his airship and has, in partnership with the Memphis Blackhawks, personally shared his aviation legacy with us as a beacon of hope to our future aviators;

**NOW**, THEREFORE ON DECEMBER 7, 2017, IT IS DECLARED AND TO BE KNOWN BY ALL THAT BECAUSE OF THIS SIGNIFICANT AVIATION JOURNEY, THE MEMPHIS BLACKHAWKS HAVE BESTOWED THE TITLE OF "HONORARY MEMBER" TO

***EUGENE MAY***

*Morris Brown*

Morris Brown - President, Memphis Blackhawks

# EUGENE MAY FLY-IN



## GIBSON COUNTY AIRPORT, TN (KTGC) SATURDAY APRIL 7, 2017 - 10 AM TO 2 PM FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

### SPONSORED BY MEMPHIS BLACKHAWKS

Meet and take pictures with 95 year old pilot Eugene May ~ born in Jackson TN ~ earned his pilot's license in 1948 ~ he could not get a flight instructor in Tennessee to teach him to fly, so he went to Chicago and trained with America's aerospace heroes Willa Brown and Cornelius Coffey ~ he encourages youth to learn to fly ~ he has flown numerous flights from Half Moon Bay in California to New York ~ still owns the 1951 chrome Swift Globe aircraft - N2453B that he purchased in 1963 ~ his prized aircraft is housed at the Gibson TN county airport! You must meet this local pilot and discover how he took a 'no' and made it a 'yes'!

- CALLING ALL PILOTS
- FREE FOOD & DRINKS & MUSIC
- TGC AIRPORT OPEN HOUSE
- AIRPLANE TOURS/RIDES
- MEET PILOTS AND OTHER AVIATION PROFESSIONALS
- LEARN ABOUT AVIATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS



**JACKSON SUN – AUGUST 14, 2018**

## **Eugene May earns Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award**

**GAIL BAILEY, Special for the Sun** Published 12:58 p.m. CT Aug. 14, 2018 | Updated 1:06 p.m. CT Aug. 14, 2018



While growing up in Jackson, Tennessee, Eugene May had a deep desire to fly airplanes from a very young age

His sister Betty Williams recently talked about his yearning to fly by describing how he often looked to the sky to watch clouds and planes and how he would study the different types of planes as

he got older. But when he became old enough to learn to fly, no one in Tennessee would teach him, because of the color of his skin.

So, May, denied for being black in the 1940s, was advised to seek lessons up North — and so he did.

“I wanted to fly more than birds fly,” May told the Sun in April.

Denied again in St. Louis, May finally gained acceptance at the Coffey School of Aeronautics in Chicago, Illinois, earning his pilot’s wings in 1948 at the age of 25.

“Nothing is handed to you on a silver platter,” May said of his experience. “You’ve got to put some kind of effort in to get there.”

Well, it seems May’s effort has been rewarded. May became an honorary member of the Memphis Blackhawks in December, and just this month received the prestigious Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award.



On Aug. 4, James Dean and David Hayes of the Federal Aviation Administration made a special trip to the rural Gibson County Airport to pay tribute, bestowing the Master Pilot Award upon May for 50 years of dedicated service in aviation safety during a special ceremony.

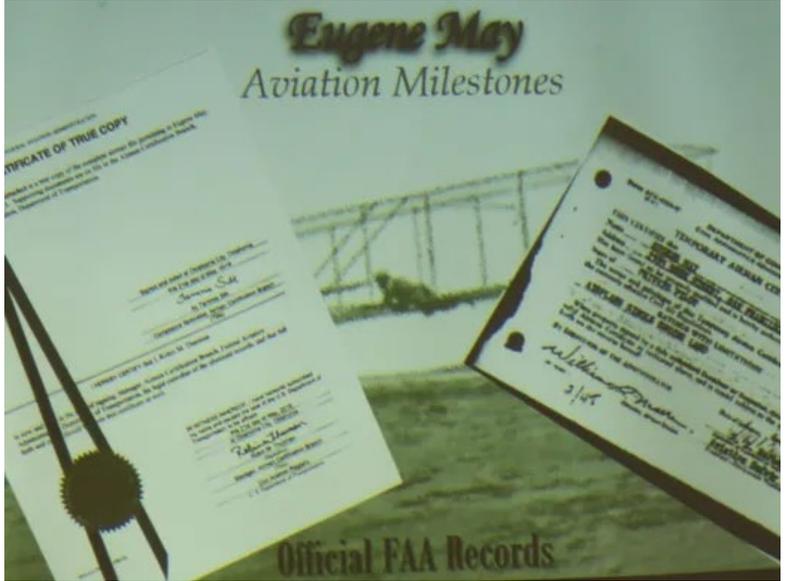
The Master Pilot award is given to pilots by the FAA and the United States Department of Transportation in recognition of pilots who help build and maintain the safest aviation system in the

world through practicing and promoting safe aircraft flight operations for 50 or more years.

At the age of 95, May has retired from flying without experiencing a safety incident during his decades-long career. But he still has a plane he bought in 1963, a 1951 chrome Swift Global airplane that he keeps hangared at the Gibson County Airport.

May still lives in Jackson, with his sister Lorraine Gill, and continues to be thrilled with the field of aviation.









# Denied flying lessons because he was black, Eugene May still went on to make history

**Brittney L. Jackson, USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee** Published 9:44 a.m. CT April 11, 2018 | Updated 1:40 p.m. CT April 11, 2018

As a young boy Eugene May dreamed of flying airplanes. He went for flying lessons in Jackson only to be denied because the color of his skin.



*(Photo: Submitted)*

[CONNECT](#)[TWEET](#)[LINKEDIN](#) [COMMENT](#)[EMAIL](#)[MORE](#)

As a young boy, Eugene May, 95, dreamed of flying airplanes. In the early 1940s he went to McKellar-Sipes Regional Airport in Jackson, hoping to get the flying lessons he'd always wanted.

"I wanted to fly more than birds fly," May said.

To May's disappointment, he was denied because he's black, and advised to seek lessons up North, as no one in the state would teach him — so he did.

The first stop was St. Louis, where he was denied again. Then there was renewed hope when May saw an advertisement in a magazine for a flight school outside Chicago. He moved to Gary, Indiana, and finally gained acceptance at the Coffey School of Aeronautics with Cornelius Coffey and Willa Brown.

“Nothing is handed to you on a silver platter,” May said. “You’ve got to put some kind of effort in to get there.”

Just like anything else, work is required to get what you want, May explained. His determination to fly couldn’t be stopped with a few *no*’s. In 1948, he finally earned his wings.

## Flying with superheroes



**Buy Photo**

Eugene May, 95, poses with his 1951 Chrome Swift Global Aircraft at the Gibson County Airport in Milan, Tennessee on April 7, 2018. (Photo: GAIL BAILEY/The Jackson Sun)

During the 1940s, aspiring black pilots were limited to where they could receive flying lessons — with some even leaving the country to learn.

Cornelius Coffey, the first African American to establish an aeronautical school in the U.S., and Willa Brown, the first African American woman to earn a commercial pilot’s

license, are “superheroes,” Memphis Blackhawk Aviation Association member and retired air traffic controller Thelma Rudd said.



**Buy Photo**

**Eugene May, of Jackson, Tennessee, earned his private pilot's license in 1948 and purchased his own 1951 Chrome Swift Global Aircraft in 1963. (Photo: GAIL BAILEY/The Jackson Sun)**

“They were teaching black people how to fly ... and they were good flyers,” Rudd said.

Coffey and Brown married in 1939 and co-founded the Cornelius Coffey School of Aeronautics, which was the only non-university aviation program to be part of the Civilian Pilot Training Program, according to [blackpast.org](http://blackpast.org). Their efforts helped integrate African Americans into the aviation industry.

After earning her private and commercial pilot's license, Brown taught hundreds of men and women how to fly, many of which became members of the [Tuskegee Airmen](http://TuskegeeAirmen), the site states.

“He had pictures with him with Cornelius Coffey and Willa Brown in Chicago,” Rudd said.



**Buy Photo**

Eugene May, 95, helps move his 1951 Chrome Swift Global aircraft into a hanger at the Gibson County Airport in Milan, Tennessee on April 7, 2018. (Photo: BRITTNEY JACKSON/The Jackson Sun)

Unfortunately, May's photos and other memorabilia were destroyed with his house in a 2008 tornado that swept through Jackson.

## **A connection 62 years in the making**

In December 2017, May was made an honorary member of the Memphis Blackhawks Aviation Association after they learned of his flying accomplishments via Morris Fair.

In 1955, a classmate of Fair's talked about his pilot-dad. Sixty-two years later, when they met at their retirement home, Fair learned that pilot was May.

When the Memphis Blackhawks were hosting an event at Fair's church, he told them he knew a black pilot who was flying before the Tuskegee Airmen, and they were soon connected with him.



Buy Photo

Eugene May, of Jackson, Tennessee, earned his private pilot's license in 1948 and purchased his own 1951 Chrome Swift Global Aircraft in 1963. (Photo: GAIL BAILEY/The Jackson Sun)

“For the 95 years that he’s been here, and flying for over 50 years — that’s amazing,” Memphis Blackhawks President Morris Brown said. “The Blackhawks definitely like to honor him for doing so, and we’re glad that we got a chance to know him.”

May was determined to fly simply because he wanted to. He wasn’t looking to be a commercial pilot or for status, he was just following his dream; he just wanted to fly.

His story is an inspiration to anyone faced with an obstacle, Rudd said.

“I hope these young people really understand what that means, and learn to not always accept *no*,” she added.

## Master pilot

In 1963, May bought a 1951 Chrome Swift Global Aircraft that he now keeps parked at the Gibson County Airport in Milan.



Eugene May, 95, looks through a photo album. May's historic photos of him with Cornelius Coffey and Willa Brown were destroyed with his house in the 2008 tornado that swept through Jackson, Tennessee. (Photo: Submitted)

Due to health conditions, he hasn't been able to fly for about two years — but he has made numerous trips from California to New York and has participated in many air shows over the years.

May is nominated for The Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award, the Federal Aviation Association's most prestigious award. The Master Pilot Award is for a pilot who has exhibited aviation skill and professionalism for at least 50 years.



**Buy Photo**

Eugene May, 95, shakes hands with Thomas Johnson from the Federal Aviation Association at the Gibson County Airport in Milan, Tennessee on April 7, 2018. May was nominated for The Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award. (Photo: GAIL BAILEY/The Jackson Sun)

“I think it’s an honor — especially for him to be a private pilot — just because of the expense that it takes to keep flying an airplane for 50 years,” Rudd said.

With only an eighth-grade education, earning a pilot's license in the '40s as a black man, and going more than 50 years with a clean flight record, is quite an accomplishment.

Reach reporter Brittney Jackson at [bljackson@gannett.com](mailto:bljackson@gannett.com) or 731-425-9643.

UA-48052453-1

## TAKING NOTE: Eugene "Budd" May 'believed he could fly'

By Special to TSDMemphis.com - 08/10/2018



*Eugene "Budd" May secured a private pilot license in 1948 and began to "touch the sky."*

**by Rev. L. LaSimba M. Gray Jr.**

Eugene "Budd" May was born in Jackson, Tenn., in 1923. His family lived on the Frank Calwell farm. While he was picking cotton, Eugene could be seen gazing in the sky at airplanes passing over. He was fascinated and dreamed he would one day fly an airplane.

Eugene and his siblings were expected to pick several hundred pounds of cotton on a daily basis. Eugene would weigh in at 25 pounds on the average. When asked why Eugene fell short, his sister, Betty May Williams, spontaneously reported, "Budd spends most of his time watching airplanes instead of picking cotton."

When Eugene finished the eighth grade, he started out on his journey to become an airplane pilot. Dismissing the culture of a segregated society and rampant discrimination against people of color, he went to the local McKellar Airport, where many Jacksonians were taking flying lessons. He was told nobody in the South would teach him to fly because he was colored. He then went to St. Louis, only to be rejected again.

Undeterred by the second rejection, Eugene moved to Gary, Ind., to continue his search for someone to teach him to fly. He had a lightbulb moment when he read of the Cornelius Coffey School of Aeronautics in Chicago. This school was organized and conducted by Cornelius Coffey, who was the first African-American to establish an aeronautical school in America. This

was the opportunity Eugene had long for. He thought nothing of walking 10 miles in the cold, ice and snow to take flying lessons in the Windy City.

Eugene's hard work and determination paid off. In 1948 he earned his private pilot license and began to "touch the sky." In 1963, he purchased his own airplane, a 1951 Chrome Swift Global Airplane. That airplane is like the Rolls Royce of sporting planes and is stored at the Gibson County Airport.

The Blackhawks of Memphis (an organization of black pilots and professionals in aviation) heard about Eugene through Morris Fair, a retired educator in Jackson. Morris had heard of Eugene in 1955, when a classmate told him his father was a pilot and flew airplanes in and out of California. Sixty-two years later, Morris and Eugene were living in the same assisted-living community.

Ruth Greer of Lane Chapel CME Church, in Humboldt, Tenn., was instrumental in having the Blackhawks make a Black history presentation to the youth. During that visit in 2017, Morris told several members of the Blackhawks that he knew a black pilot who was flying airplanes before the Tuskegee Airmen. This information generated a great deal of interest and led the Blackhawks to secure the much-deserved recognition for Eugene.



*Federal Aviation Administration representatives were alongside Eugene May as he received the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award.  
(Courtesy photos)*

On Aug. 4, the Blackhawks invited the general public to witness the bestowal of the prestigious Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award upon Eugene May. This award is given by the Federal Aviation Administration to individuals who have demonstrated aviation skills, professionalism and safety for 50 years or more. The little boy, who once stood in the cotton fields of Madison

County dreaming to fly, did so for 70 years without an accident. Eugene "Budd" May truly exemplified the pilot's motto: be sure to have as many safe landings as you have takeoffs.

At 95 years of age, Eugene May was celebrated and he could hear the compliments and feel the fellowship thanks to the leadership of the Memphis Blackhawks; Morris Brown; Thelma Rudd; Lane College president Dr. Logan Hampton; Loraine May Gill and Betty May Williams (sisters of Eugene); Morris Fair; and a host of family members and friends.

I shall forever wonder why this award was not given at the McKellar-Sipes Regional Airport in Jackson or why Eugene did not store his Chrome Swift Global Airplane at McKellar-Sipes?

*This is the first in a series of periodic columns by the Rev. Dr. L. LaSimba M. Gray Jr., pastor emeritus of New Sardis Missionary Baptist Church.*

---

---

**Special to TSDMemphis.com**

<http://www.tsdmemphis.com>

[Privacy Policy](#)