

**NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **LARRY DIFFLEY MEMORIAL AVIATION SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS PRESENTED TO TWO RECIPIENTS**

**March 6, 2023 (Bemidji, MN)** – Two recipients of the Larry Diffley Memorial Aviation Scholarship have been announced by the fund advisory committee. The scholarship provides annual awards to qualified applicants who plan to advance their flight training at Bemidji Aviation, have a deep passion for flying, and intend to pursue aviation as a career.

The scholarship was awarded to two recipients: Ayush Sharma and Devin Wikstrom.

**Ayush Sharma** is an international student who moved to Bemidji after obtaining his undergraduate degree in aviation from Minnesota State University Mankato. He is an FAA Certified Dispatcher and works as an airline operation specialist at Bemidji Aviation. The opportunity for employment at Bemidji Aviation, as well as the potential scholarship, brought him north to work toward licensure. He will soon earn his private license and will then continue on toward earning his instrument and commercial license.

“I want to become an airline pilot; I would love to stay here and fly,” said Ayush, who is originally from India but moved with his family to Ireland. “I am the first generation in my family to become a pilot. My father, Manish Kaushik, has inspired me to follow my passion in aviation, what he couldn’t follow himself.”

**Devin Wikstrom** earned his private pilot’s license about three years ago and is working toward his instrument license and commercial license. He said the scholarship is particularly helpful for him as he welcomed a daughter last year and is now expecting a second child. He has worked at Bemidji Aviation for five years and plans to become a corporate pilot, like his own father.

“I would like to do what my dad does but also tie in what I’ve learned here, at Bemidji Aviation,” Devin said. “I started here through on-the-job training, no college. But they sent me down to college in Tennessee and I got my A&P license (for aviation mechanics). I would like to somehow tie the two together.”

The scholarship fund was established by the family of Bemidji Aviation’s former President, Larry Diffley, to honor his passion for quality aviation training and helping others who intend to become professional pilots. If you are interested in supporting this scholarship or learning about how you can establish a scholarship fund at Northwest Minnesota Foundation, please visit [www.nwmf.org](http://www.nwmf.org).

**PHOTO CUTLINES:**

**Devin and Tracie**



Pictured are, from left: Devin Wikstrom and Tracie Walter, Vice President of Bemidji Aviation.

**Ayush and Tracie**



Pictured are, from left: Ayush Sharma and Tracie Walter, Vice President of Bemidji Aviation.