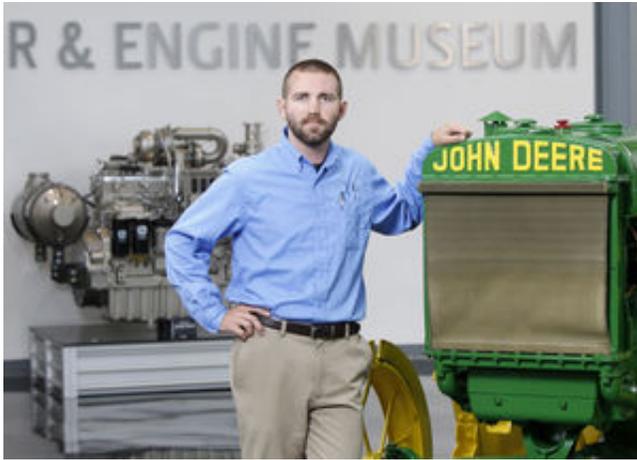


Jonathan Walter: Soaring to new heights



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Last in a series of stories highlighting the 2015 20 Under 40 recipients.

INDEPENDENCE — Jonathan Walter set his career goals a bit higher than many of his peers.

His interest always has been airplanes. At first, he thought he might want to design aircraft. He found, however, he'd rather fly them.

Now he owns two aviation companies, teaches others to fly and has carved a business niche for himself.

"I attended Iowa State for one year — that was after taking my first airplane ride," Walter said. "I went to school and decided I'd much rather fly than design them, so I came home."

Walter, who grew up in Independence, came back, took flying lessons and earned his pilot's license in 2009.

Three years later, he opened his own flying school at Independence Municipal Airport, a facility he has managed since July 2012.

Oh, and he's only 25.

His career has taken flight.

"Certainly, I didn't expect to be running my own business by age 25, but I've always had the interest in doing my own thing," Walter said. "I've always enjoyed being a leader but being self-dependent in what I do. It just kind of fit and kind of pulled together. I had opportunities that popped up and didn't hesitate to take them."

Walter's first business venture was Iowa Aerial Advertising, which he launched in 2011 after having purchased his first aircraft. The plane came with some banner-towing equipment, which really was the chief lure of the purchase.

"It had all this extra equipment that the previous owner wasn't using, and I thought it was kind of a neat idea and something that hadn't been done in Iowa that I had known, for years anyway, so we started towing banners in September 2011," he said.

If there's a banner fluttering over a football game, a city festival or any massive gathering of people, chances are high Walter or an associate is towing it.

He runs the flight school with his girlfriend, Gretchen Fisher, who is one of his former flight students.

Fisher and Angie Shephard, another Walter employee, nominated Walter for The Courier's 20 Under 40 honor in 2015. They pointed out Walter works directly with the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration in training and certifying upcoming banner tow pilots and operators.

"To this day, this is the only certified banner towing business in Iowa," they said.

Along with the flight school, Walter directs FAA Part 135 Charter Operations and FAA Part 135 Air Cargo Operations. Walter Aviation also provides a full-service maintenance shop, 24-hour full-serve fuel, aerial photography, agricultural surveying and scenic air tours.

Walter is active in the Independence Area Chamber of Commerce and donates various services to local organizations such as Junior Achievement, the Juvenile Diabetes Fund and local schools.

"Jonathan is committed to raising awareness of general aviation," Fisher and Shephard said.

"He strives to encourage young people to experience the thrill of flight by hosting Boy Scout and Girl Scout troop tours and activities and speaking at many local career day functions. Walter Aviation and Iowa Aerial Advertising are more than just businesses to Jonathan, they are his passion."

Jonathan Walter

- **Age:** 25.
- **Occupation:** President of Walter Aviation Co. and Iowa Aerial Advertising, Independence.
- **Volunteer activities:** Board member, Independence Area Chamber of Commerce; conducting tours for area students.
- **Education:** Attended Iowa State University one year; earned pilot's license in 2009.