



BY TEXTRON AVIATION



# RUSSELL W. "RUSS" MEYER JR.

CESSNA AIRCRAFT COMPANY

## EARLY LIFE, EDUCATION AND AVIATION CAREER

- Born in Davenport, Iowa, on July 19, 1932, Meyer earned a B.A. from Yale University in 1954 and a Doctor of Law degree from Harvard Law School in 1961.
- He served as a jet pilot in the U.S. Air Force (1955-1958) and then as a fighter pilot with the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves (1958-1961).
- After practicing aviation law (1961-1966), he became president and CEO of Grumman American Aviation Corporation in 1966 and led it until 1974.
- Meyer was a commercial, instrument-rated pilot with more than 17,000 flight hours in his lifetime. At the time of his retirement, he was type-rated in every Cessna Citation model ever produced.

## BUILDING CESSNA INTO A BUSINESS-JET POWERHOUSE

**Joining and leading Cessna.** Meyer joined Cessna Aircraft Company as executive vice-president in June 1974 and was elected chairman and CEO in 1975; he led Cessna for nearly three decades, stepping aside as chairman in 2003 but remaining chairman emeritus.

**Father of the Cessna Citation jet line.** During Meyer's tenure, Cessna developed the Citation family of business jets. Aviation journalists and owners nicknamed him the "father of the Citation line." Under his leadership, Cessna delivered almost 5,000 Citation jets (out of roughly 67,000 aircraft delivered while he was Chairman). This legacy has grown to now more than 8,000 Citations delivered to customers across the globe. Citations combined turboprop efficiency with cabin comfort, giving corporations and entrepreneurs practical access to jet travel.

Famed golfer and friend of Meyer, Arnold Palmer was the first customer to take delivery of a Citation X. Palmer was an avid pilot and long-time Cessna client, and his high-profile involvement helped showcase the Citation X's capabilities. In fact, he personally set a speed record in the Citation X in September 1997 – averaging 473 knots (876 km/h) on a 5,000 km closed-course flight, near the jet's top speed of Mach 0.92. This public demonstration by Palmer underscored the Citation X's performance and solidified its reputation as the world's fastest business jet of its era.





**Collier Trophy-winning achievements.** In 1986, Cessna and Meyer received the Robert J. Collier Trophy for the worldwide safety record of the Citation fleet. A decade later, they earned the Collier again for designing, testing and certifying the Citation X — a business jet that used a supercritical wing developed with NASA and became the first civil aircraft certified to cruise at Mach 0.92. The Citation X's efficiency and 51,000-ft ceiling set new standards for speed and long-range capability.

## **SAVING GENERAL AVIATION – THE GENERAL AVIATION REVITALIZATION ACT OF 1994 (GARA)**

By the early 1990s, only about 500 piston aircraft were being sold annually, down from 13,000 per year in the late 1970s — largely due to soaring product-liability costs. Meyer, then chairman of Cessna and the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA), worked with GAMA president Ed Stimpson to devise a solution. They used the 1993 “National Commission to Ensure a Strong Competitive Airline Industry” to lobby for a statute of repose protecting manufacturers from lawsuits over very old aircraft.

Their effort culminated in the General Aviation Revitalization Act (GARA), signed by President Bill Clinton on Aug. 17, 1994. The law created an 18-year limitation period for civil actions arising from accidents involving general-aviation aircraft. Meyer considered GARA his greatest accomplishment.

Immediately after the law's signing, Meyer announced Cessna would restart piston aircraft production and search for a new facility. Cessna subsequently built a factory in Independence, Kansas, and delivered new Cessna 172s in 1996.

The law sparked an industry renaissance: Piper emerged from bankruptcy, kit-plane builders pursued certification and, by 2023, more than 43,000 piston airplanes had been delivered under the regime created by GARA. The statute of repose remains a cornerstone of U.S. aviation law.

## **ORIGINATING THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS AIRLIFT**

In 1986, Meyer conceived the Citation Special Olympics Airlift, an initiative in which Citation owners volunteered their aircraft to transport athletes to the National Special Olympics Games. The program began when a Special Olympics official asked if Cessna could fly a dozen athletes to the 1985 Winter Games, and Meyer decided to involve the entire Citation community.

By 1987, more than 130 Citation jets flew athletes to the Summer Games, with landing and departures timed every 90 seconds. The airlift has continued for four decades, transporting over 10,000 athletes and coaches.

As the world's largest peacetime airlift, the event has become a signature philanthropic tradition in aviation. Now including the entire Cessna, Beechcraft and Hawker family of brands, the next Special Olympics Airlift event is scheduled for June 2026 in Minnesota's Twin Cities.

## **INVESTING IN COMMUNITY AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**21st Street Training Program.** Meyer believed corporate responsibility extended beyond aircraft sales. In 1990 he established the Cessna 21st Street Training Program in partnership with Wichita and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide academic, personal and vocational skills training for residents of the city's struggling northeast side.

- Trainees received wages and benefits during training and were guaranteed employment at Cessna upon graduation.
- By the late 1990s the program had expanded to a campus with a 27,000-sq-ft assembly facility, a 20,000-sq-ft learning/day-care center and on-site housing.
- The project placed over 321 people in full-time jobs — almost three times its original goal — and Harvard University honored Meyer with the George S. Dively Award in 1991 for corporate public initiative.



**Boys & Girls Club and health clinics.** Meyer and his wife Helen spearheaded the construction of a 42,000-sq-ft Boys & Girls Club facility in south-central Kansas and led campaigns for GraceMed Health Clinics, providing healthcare for low-income families. Newman University's "Difference Makers" program named its community-leadership award in his honor, noting his "undeniable imprint" on Wichita's working poor.

**Be A Pilot program.** Meyer also helped create and promote the Be A Pilot program, a national initiative to reverse the decline in student pilot starts. The program evolved into GA Team 2000 and introduced thousands of people to general aviation.

## INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL SERVICE

**General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA).** Meyer chaired GAMA in 1974, 1982 and 1994. He worked tirelessly with the association to advocate for safety, training and regulatory reform.

### Presidential and FAA commissions

1987 — Appointed to the Aviation Safety Commission by President Reagan, which submitted a comprehensive report on the air transportation system in 1988

1993 — Appointed to President Clinton's National Commission to Ensure a Strong and Competitive Airline Industry, where he used the platform to push for GARA

2004 — Served on the FAA Management Advisory Council

### Selection of awards and honors

1986 — Robert J. Collier Trophy for the worldwide safety record of the Cessna Citation fleet; this was the first time in the long history of America's highest aviation award that the Collier Trophy had been presented to an individual or company in the general aviation industry

1991 — George S. Dively Award from Harvard University for corporate public initiative, presented for the creation of the 21st Street Training Program, a comprehensive academic, personal and on-site vocational skills training program for Wichita's inner-city residents

1995 — Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy from the National Aeronautic Association for leadership in the revitalization of general aviation, effective public service and active involvement in the creation and support of innovative aviation-related programs and opportunities for the disadvantaged and disabled

1995 — Meritorious Service to Aviation Award from the National Business Aircraft Association for his tireless efforts to gain passage of the General Aviation Revitalization Act

1996 — Robert J. Collier Trophy for designing, testing and certifying the Citation X, a business jet that used a supercritical wing developed with NASA and became the first civil aircraft certified to cruise at Mach 0.92

1996 — Kansas Aviation Hall of Fame induction

1998 — Named Kansan of the Year

2009 — National Aviation Hall of Fame enshrinement

2012 — Carol B. Hallett Award at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Aviation Summit in recognition of more than four decades of leadership, policy advocacy and service to the aviation industry

2024 — R.A. "Bob" Hoover Award from the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) for inspiring new generations of pilots and for his lifelong commitment to general aviation



Cessna

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## ENDURING LEGACY

Russ Meyer was an aviator, attorney and passionate advocate who believed that business success carried civic obligations. He championed product-liability reform at a time when the general-aviation industry faced collapse, created a line of business jets that democratized business jet travel and built programs that trained inner-city residents and uplifted Special Olympics athletes. His record — 67,000 aircraft delivered, an industry saved, thousands of jobs created and countless lives touched — ensures that his name will remain revered in aviation history forever.

Innovator, Champion, Legend

**RUSSELL W. “RUSS” MEYER JR.**

JULY 19, 1932 – MARCH 4, 2026

