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Aviation scholarship awarded in memory of controller lost in quake

A fascination with aviation from a young age, and a career commitment to understanding the human factors involved in aviation safety, have proved a winning combination for a talented air traffic controller. Lucy Mitchell has been announced as the inaugural winner of the Jilly Murphy Scholarship for Aviation Safety.

The scholarship, offered jointly by Airways New Zealand and Christchurch Airport, is provided in memory of Jilly Murphy, an air traffic controller at the Christchurch Airways tower, who died in the central city during the earthquake of 22 February, 2011.

Andy Lester, Chief Operating Officer at Christchurch Airport, said the airport company and Airways believed a scholarship in Jilly's honour would provide a fitting memorial for their much loved and respected colleague.

"We wanted to find a way to remember Jilly and to honour the dedicated work she did so very well and was so passionate about," he said. "Our winner, Lucy Mitchell, demonstrated an obvious and enthusiastic passion for aviation safety. Her very strong interest in human factors related to safe operations was very compelling and she demonstrated to us that she thinks about aviation safety every day," says Mr Lester.

Lucy Mitchell believes her background in the British Royal Air Force formed her desire to attain the highest standards when controlling, and developed her exceptional levels of awareness in identifying safety issues. Lucy trained and worked as an Air Traffic Control Officer in the RAF for five years before joining Airways in New Zealand in 2010.

"Day to day, safety is always in the forefront of my mind, particularly in relation to the ever increasing interface between people and technology," she says. "As we're advancing in aviation, we have a greater number of automated tools, with increased reliance on computers, and the risk elements are found in how people interact with that technology. High levels of discipline and professionalism are essential in our industry, particularly in regards to the critical safety aspects. I'd like my career to benefit the aviation industry through specialised knowledge in this area of human to technology interaction," she says.

Airways CEO Ed Sims said Lucy models the commitment and passion that Jilly Murphy had for aviation safety.

"We were delighted that Lucy Mitchell was the successful scholarship winner this year, as her commitment to aviation safety made her the perfect inaugural winner. We know Jilly would

be very proud to see the scholarship fund used directly to keeping New Zealanders safe,” he says.

The scholarship will be awarded in a ceremony today at the base of the Airways air traffic control tower at Christchurch Airport, where a memorial seat has been placed in honour of Jilly Murphy.

Lucy Mitchell’s scholarship prize of \$5000 will partially fund the Master of Science in Ergonomics and Human Factors that she intends to complete in her spare time while working at Airways.



Airways air traffic controller Lucy Mitchell (right), winner of the Jilly Murphy Scholarship for Aviation Safety, sits with Jilly’s father John Murphy (left) on the memorial seat erected in Jilly’s honour outside Christchurch Control Tower.



Airways air traffic controller Lucy Mitchell (third from left), winner of the Jilly Murphy Scholarship for Aviation Safety, stands with Jilly’s father John Murphy (left), Airways CEO Ed Sims, and Christchurch Airport Chief Operating Officer Andy Lester beside the memorial seat erected in Jilly’s honour outside Christchurch Control Tower.