

# Aviation through my eyes

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When I was young, I dreamt of working on planes or flying them. I learned how to fly a plane before I learned how to drive. I took flying lessons with family at a young age and remember being so comfortable that I'd fall asleep in the back of the plane. And now, I get to be around the machines I love most. I'm an aviation maintenance technician (AMT) at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL). After five years on the job, I can tell you that the learning never stops.

American Airlines investment in my education and career began when I was a senior at George T. Baker Aviation Technical College in Miami. American formed a partnership with the school when they donated a McDonnell Douglas MD-80, allowing students to get practical hands-on experience.

Once I earned my AMT degree and was hired, I took classes that certified me to work on several different aircraft. I'm certified to work on the Boeing 757, 737-800, Airbus A319, A320, A321, A330-200, A330-300 and Embraer E190. I'm incredibly proud of my accomplishments. Being a woman in this field has its challenges — sometimes people will question you — but you always have to believe in yourself and your skillset.

I understand that people are used to seeing male mechanics. Sometimes, I'll walk on a plane and my colleagues mention they're waiting for the AMT. I smile and say, "That's me!" This is still a male-dominated field, but more women are joining American in this profession every day. And I'm proud to say that since I've started, I've seen fewer assumptions that the AMT responsible for the safety of the plane is a man.

March is Women's History Month, and I feel it's my responsibility to help other women grow in my field. I recently started an Association for Women in Aviation Maintenance (AWAM) chapter here in South Florida to help foster interest in the industry. My hope is that one day seeing a woman AMT will be just as common as seeing a male

AMT. I continue to encourage other young women to consider a career in STEM every chance I get. I know that with hard work and dedication, it can become their reality.

I'm also working on putting together an all-female team for the Aerospace Maintenance Competition that takes place each April. I have my personal Instagram account (@FixFlyTravel) where I showcase the uniqueness of my field. I love sharing my perspective and showing my support for other women that need encouragement.

Our job is critical to the safety of our customers and the success of the airline, and we take it seriously. Together, my 130,000 colleagues and I have the pleasure of keeping you safe on the ground and in the air.

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AMT Elena Gonzalez works on an engine.