

# St. Croix Resident Receives FAA's 'Master Pilot' Award

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Surrounded by his peers, Nicholas Castruccio, 88, received the highest Federal Aviation Administration award in aviation Wednesday evening at a ceremony at the Henry B. Rohlsen Airport.

Among other qualifications, the recipient of the Master Pilot award must have more than 50 years' experience as a civil and/or military pilot. His or her pilot certification must have never been revoked and he must be of good moral character.



“The Master Pilot is for a prestigious background and career, an outstanding pilot for 50 years,” said Abel Mirabel, FAA representative from San Juan, as he presented the award. Castruccio’s name will be honored permanently in Washington, D.C., he added.

William Bohlke, of Bohlke International Airways, gave a brief history of Castruccio’s flying career and life on St. Croix.

“Nick makes the Wright brothers look like sissies,” Bohlke said.

After graduating from college, Castruccio graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and flew 20 years for the Navy. During that time, he commanded flight crews on aircraft carriers and was an instructor pilot. He served in Korea twice, earning 10 air medals and attended test pilot school before moving to St. Croix in the early 1970’s.

Castruccio was an aviation pioneer during his career in the Virgin Islands. He was the chief pilot for Antilles Airboats, the general manager of Resorts Airline and a flight instructor at Bohlke International. He was one of the founders of V.I. Seaplane Shuttle. According to Bohlke, the master pilot was available at almost any time to teach young people to fly. His last flight was in September 2012, at the age of 86 – a record, Bohlke said.

“What gets to my heart is what Nick has done for this community,” Bohlke said.

Not only was Castruccio at home in the air, but the sea as well. He taught sailing, was president of the V.I. Sailing Federation and founded at least one local sailing race. Now, he raises funds for the Frederiksted Sailing School.

Castruccio said a few words of gratitude to his family, friends and his contemporaries – six people who worked at Antilles Airboats with him. He commented that he made his first solo flight exactly 45 years after the Wright brothers’ famous flight.

“It’s been great and I hope to fly again when Bill gets me a light-sport aircraft,” he said. He joked because a flight physical is not required, only a driver’s license. A light-sport aircraft is a two-seater, single engine, non-pressurized plane with a maximum airspeed of 138 miles per hour.

After a standing ovation for Castruccio, Mirabel was recognized for 34 years with the FAA. He received a gift and enthusiastic applause from the audience, many of whom were pilots he knew well.