



**NYAMA MEMBER PROFILE**  
**Shelley LaRose-Arken**  
**Commissioner of Aviation and Transportation**  
**MacArthur Airport and Bayport Aerodrome**

Shelley LaRose-Arken, a fixture for decades in Long Island’s aviation community, had a very different career planned as a kid: She was going to be an accountant.

Great idea, she thought at the time, except for one tiny problem.

“I was terrible with numbers,” the NYAMA Board member says with a laugh.

So instead of majoring in accounting, the teenaged LaRose-Arken took a gap year and – following the example set by her stepfather – became a pilot. She logged enough hours and gained sufficient expertise to eventually earn a commercial-instrument and multi-engine license.

Meanwhile, she enrolled at the Florida Institute of Technology, where she majored in aviation management and flight technology. Following an internship at Spirit of St. Louis Airport not far from her childhood home in Kansas City, Kansas, LaRose-Arken landed her first full-time aviation gig in the noise abatement office of Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International Airport.

In 1994, she came east to Westchester Airport, where she was greeted by eye-popping New York real estate prices.

“I moved here on April first, April Fool’s Day, but it was no joke,” she says, laughing again. “I thought I might have to head back home.”

Former NYAMA President Joel Russell, who was managing Westchester at the time, helped LaRose-Arken acclimate to life in the East, she says, and he turned out to be the right mentor at the right time.

“I learned a lot from him, things that I still use today, especially from a planning perspective,” she says. “We did some big projects there and it was very inspirational. When I got there we were still working out of a Quonset hut and we were getting ready to build a new terminal. That time at Westchester turned out to be a great experience,” and one that prepared her for her next stop, four years later, at Republic Airport.

“I planned on spending just a few years there,” she says. “I wound up staying for 18.”

She met her husband – a pilot for American Airlines – on the ramp outside her office, and they married in 2002. She became airport manager in 2005, and during her tenure, oversaw a \$72 million capital improvement program that delivered a relocated taxiway, a model security program for general aviation airports, two EMAS projects, a new approach lighting system, rebuilt perimeter roads, and much more.

LaRose-Arken’s arrival at Republic coincided with her introduction to NYAMA, and she’s been a member of the organization for nearly 20 years.

“I think NYAMA has done such a great job raising awareness for our industry in this state, getting people more engaged and more involved,” she says, “and every five years or so, we seem to raise the bar. Our lobbying efforts, even though I haven’t been able to participate in them, really show how influential NYAMA has become. The advocacy work we did led directly to the Aviation Jobs Act, which not only changed the way we do aviation business in this state, but also changed people’s awareness of NYAMA itself – what it does, and what it means to our state’s industry and its economy.

“That, I think, was a real turning point, when NYAMA became a real agent of change. And now we’re stepping up our communications and trying to expand our reach to younger people, the next generation of airport managers, college students who are interested in working and staying in New York. It’s really exciting to see, and I would encourage more people to get involved where they can.”

LaRose-Arken stays busy these days in her newest role as the commissioner overseeing MacArthur Airport in Islip and the nearby Bayport Aerodrome. She's excited to engage in air service development for her commercial facility, touting a customer-focused approach to developing new routes, along with a new slogan: "Stress Less, Pay Less."

Elsewhere, plans are under way for a new U.S. Customs and Border Protection facility, there's a new restaurant vendor in the main terminal, and a study is about to launch that will review the feasibility of creating a connection between MacArthur and the Long Island Rail Road.

"I'm really enjoying where I'm at right now," LaRose-Arken says. "I love being part of this airport."