

FLYING HIGH



Chris Collins stands with Young Eagles pilots at a rally held at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport last fall. Submitted photo

Collins helps young pilots

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MT. VERNON — Chris Collins wanted to be a pilot growing up, but wasn't sure how to

achieve his goal.

Now, his dream realized, he works to help the next generation find their way.

"I always wanted to be in aviation," Collins said. "I didn't know how to get

here, ... I don't want that to happen to anybody else."

Collins, director at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport, was recently

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celebrated for flying more than 300 kids in the Experimental Aircraft Association's Young Eagles program. He's also Mt. Vernon's Young Eagles coordinator. Along with volunteer pilots at the airport, Collins works to organize Young Eagle rallies twice a year so area youth can experience flight.

"It's an effort to try to get kids to have a better appreciation of their world," Collins said. "We're not necessarily

trying to make everyone an airplane pilot, we're just trying to give them a different experience. Seeing Jefferson County from 1,500 to 2,000 feet over the ground, showing kids that with a little bit of study and some dedication, you can achieve flying an airplane."

Collins said the Young Eagles aren't just his venture, the group is managed by a team. He attributed much of the hard work to many dedicated pilots and volunteers.

"Most of the people that are flying the kids are born and raised here, and they have achieved this dream of earning a pilot's license and maybe owning an airplane, and so we relay that to

the kids that you can do things with your life," Collins said. "There are goals that are attainable with a little bit of work and a little bit of dedication."

Young pilots ages 8 to 17 can participate in Young Eagle rallies. The program begins with an overview of routes, winds, altitudes and call signs. Collins also said a major component of the training before takeoff is safety. Weather conditions are monitored closely before pilots will take the participants up in a plane.

The flight covers Mt. Vernon, following Highway 15 west to Rend Lake. After the flight, the Young Eagles are given a certificate to commemo-

rate their flight.

The national Young Eagles program was launched in 1992, and since then more than 2 million kids have been flown. There are half a million members in the program, with local chapters all over the country. Mt. Vernon's chapter launched in 1996.

"If there's young people out here in the community who want to be in aviation, please come out here and talk to us," Collins said. "There is no better time than right now to be in aviation."

The next Young Eagles rally is set for May 19 at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. For more information, call 242-7016 or email managemvaaa@mvn.net.

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