

Airport plans for EAA race

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MT. VERNON — Mt. Vernon Outland Airport is gearing up to once again host the EAA AirVenture Cup Race from July 17 to 19.

Organizers say this year's event will draw an estimated 73 race planes, not to mention support planes, racing staff and mechanics. That should mean a significant boost for local tourism in terms of hotel rooms and meals, said Airport Director Chris Collins.

EAA stands for the Experimental Aircraft Association.

"It helps to extend the tax base, so the weekend has a huge economic impact for the community," Collins said.

Mt. Vernon Airport hosted the event for the first time in 2013. The hope is that from now on Mt. Vernon will host in odd years while Mitchell, S.D., will host in even years. Dayton, Ohio, was the host prior to Mt. Vernon in 2011.

"We were able to recruit them to come here in 2013," Collins said. "They were looking for a more southerly route because of logistics (around) Chicago airspace. ... It's been our interest to keep them coming here."

A wide range of activities are planned for this year's three-day event.

Pilots will begin arriving at around 9 a.m. on Friday, July 17, and the arrivals should last throughout the day.

Then on Saturday, July 18, race participants, in partnership with the airport, will present an airport open house from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

During this event, spectators will be allowed to visit the race pit, inspect the race planes, talk to competing pilots, and learn about the Mt. Vernon Airport, states an AirVenture news release.

Also on July 18, EAA Young Eagle rides will be offered from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. This is where children ages 8 to 17 can take part in free airplane rides.

The AirVenture Cup Race itself kicks off at 9 a.m. on Sunday, July 19. More than 70 aircraft will take off from Mt. Vernon to begin the 409 nautical mile race. The race goes from Mt. Vernon Airport to Wausau Downtown Airport in Wausau, Wis.

"It highlights the capabilities of our airport and it keeps us on the aviation map nationwide," Collins

said of the race. "There's only one starting point and it's in Mt. Vernon, Illinois. And I'm proud of that."

Organizers say the race is considered one of the world's fastest cross country air races. It was founded in 1997 in the spirit of recreating the old Bendix Trophy Race, the news release states.

This year's airport activities are free for the public. However, spectators are asked to bring items to donate to the Lifeboat Alliance Homeless Shelter.

Needed items include trash bags, paper towels, paper plates, copy paper, and coffee, sugar and creamer. Collection bins will be located throughout the airport or donations can be made directly to Lifeboat Alliance, the release states.

For more information on the event, visit www.mtvernonairport.com/airventure_cup_race.html or www.airventurecuprace.com.