

The AirVenture Cup Race teaches children about

Kids, age 8 to 17, were given free airplane rides with trained pilots in order to spark an interest in aviation

BY GREG PETERSON
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MT. VERNON — With the 2015 EAA AirVenture Cup Race starting in Mt. Vernon Sunday morning, locals came to the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport Saturday to meet the racers and see their airplanes.

Children who came to the airport Saturday were able to get a first-hand aviation experience through the EAA Young Eagle flights that were offered to children, ages 8 to 17.

The EAA Young Eagle program gives children an introduction into the world of aviation with a free plane ride with a professional pilot who volunteer their time and aircraft to teach about aviation.

Following the flight, each participant received a certificate making them an official Young Eagle. Their names were entered into the "World's Largest Logbook," which is on permanent display at the EAA AirVenture Museum in Oshkosh, Wis. The logbook is also available online.

Joe Coraggio, vice chairman of the 2015 AirVenture Cup Race, stated, "The Young Eagle program is an EAA program, and it started back in the early '90s."

He informed that the original goal of the program was to fly 1 million kids by the 100th anniversary of the first powered flight. Coraggio said that the goal was accomplished in 2003 and since then, the total number is approximately 1.7 million kids who have participated.

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"Basically what we are trying to do is give a free airplane ride to kids, ages 8 to 17, to get them interested in aviation and to show them that aviation is a viable career and hobby that anybody can do," stated Coraggio.

Though many children may have already traveled commercially in an airplane, the Young Eagle program offers a much different experience with aviation.

Coraggio said, "It's a completely different sensation and vision from a small airplane where you can see all around you, fly over your home or your high school, and see your home town from the air."

According to Coraggio, the participants in the Young Eagle flights get to fly in a variety of aircraft, which belong to the various volunteer pilots. He said that the airplanes range from old classic planes to brand new ones.

"It's a completely volunteer program," stated Coraggio, "The volunteer pilots supply their plane, and their fuel, and their time in the interest of getting young people involved and interested in aviation."

Coraggio said that he is a product of the Young Eagles program. He said that AirVenture Cup Race Chairman Eric Whyte was a family friend who gave Coraggio his first Young Eagle flight. Coraggio said that Whyte was a Young Eagle as well, which makes him a second generation Young Eagle and all the kids he gives rides to are third generation Young Eagles.

"It's a program that does

work," stated Coraggio. He informed that he is now an airline pilot flying for the airlines.

According to Coraggio, the aviation education of the Young Eagles program doesn't end after the plane ride. He said that there is a free ground school that interested parties can get involved with by going to the EAA website.

The air race begins at 9 a.m. today. More than 70 aircraft are expected to travel the course of 409 nautical miles from Mt. Vernon Outland Airport to Wausau Downtown Airport. The race helps kick off the annual EAA AirVenture Oshkosh fly-in and convention.

Participation in any of the events is free, and spectators are asked to bring items to donate to the Lifeboat Alliance Homeless Shelter.
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Sentinel Photo/GREG PETERSON

YOUNG EAGLE — As part of the AirVenture Cup Race being in Mt. Vernon over the weekend, kids ages 8 to 17 were given free Young Eagle flights to spark an interest in aviation. Pictured LEFT TO RIGHT: Charity, Chasity, Traeonna, and AirVenture Cup Race Chairman Eric Whyte.



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AIRCRAFT EXPLANATION — Eric Whyte, Chairman of the AirVenture Cup Race explains the composition of the airplane's wings to participants in the Young Eagle program at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport Saturday. The program offers children a first-hand education of aviation.