

Airport welcomes AirVenture racers

Open house includes Young Eagles rides, meet and greet

BY LEAH WILLIAMS

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MT. VERNON — The Mt. Vernon Outland Airport was a hub of activity Saturday during an open house event where many of the events offered were also dedicated to the love of aviation.

Participants in the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) AirVenture Cup Race were present with their aircraft across the airport grounds. Members of the community were welcomed to roam and get up and close to nearly 100 airplanes and also meet and greet with pilots as they get ready for the race.

For the third time, Mt. Vernon is the host to the start of the EAA AirVenture Cup Race. The AirVenture Cup race is set to begin today at 9 a.m., with contestants leaving

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the Mt. Vernon airport for Oshkosh, Wis.

Now in its 20th year, the first AirVenture Cup race was run in July 1998 from Kitty Hawk, N.C., a nonstop journey to Oshkosh totaling 800 nautical miles.

Eric Whyte, one of the co-founders of the AirVenture Cup race, said the pilots participating in the race come from all over the country.

"There's a vast range — a kind of smorgasbord, if you will — of different varieties of airplanes here," Whyte said. "We have a cast of characters."



FOR THE LOVE OF FLIGHT — The community welcomed EAA AirVenture racers Saturday during an all-day open house held at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. This morning at 9 a.m. for the start of the EAA AirVenture Cup Race.

Sentinel Photo/LEAH WILLIAMS

Keith Phillips of Daytona Beach, Fla., flies a Swearin-gen SX-300, a kit he bought in 1985. An Air Force fighter pilot for 20 years, Phillips has more than 60 years of flight experience.

Phillips said he first started participating in the AirVenture Cup Race since its second year. His son, Tim, is his co-pilot.

"I'm an airport bum, airplanes have been," Phillips said. "One of my boys are flying with me. They have been flying since they were kids."

Phillips explained that while an interest in flying may be the reason many to participate, what is truly special is he close knit community that forms over that bond. Each race is like a reunion and a way to catch up with friends and fellow colleagues.

"There's a camaraderie here that is very unique," he said.

Mt. Vernon now has the opportunity to host the opening part of the race every other year. In alternate years, the AirVenture Cup race launches out of Mitchell, S.D.

The open house at the airport, Whyte said, is a chance for the EAA AirVenture Cup participants to give back and show their gratitude to the Mt. Vernon community.

"People have been so great," he said. "This is a chance for us to give back to the city of Mt. Vernon. It's a good time to come out and see the airplanes and get free airplane rides."

Also at the airport Saturday was the EAA Young Eagles flight, where children ages 8 to 17 were able to take free airplane rides with pilots.

Saturday morning wasn't the first time 12-year-old Clayton Roach rode in an aircraft. His mother, Linda Ballard, said last September, Clayton was airlifted to an area hospital.

"He didn't think he was ever going to get to," Ballard said.

After a few reservations, Roach was all smiles after his Young Eagle flight. He said he thought it was going to be scary but he ended up loving it.

"It was something I've always wanted to do," Roach told his pilot Michael Payne of Woodlawn.

Whyte also presented on Friday the city of Mt. Vernon with a signed program from the 2015 AirVenture Cup race and promised the airport a similar token of appreciation from this year's event. **7-23-17** lwilliams@newsentinel.com

EAGLE FLIGHT



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ABOVE LEFT, Sean May, 11, of Dahlgren rides in the backseat with Clayton Roach, 12 of Mt. Vernon and May's younger sister Emily in the front Saturday morning during the EAA AirVenture open house event at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. The Young Eagles flight program offered area children the opportunity to take to the skies with a pilot. "It was amazing!" Emily May said while Sean agreed that it was "awesome." Flying the plane is Michael Payne of Woodlawn. **ABOVE RIGHT,** Kaylin Hampton, 4, of Bonnie lets his mom Wendy know how many seats the Lancair Legacy Fg has during the EAA AirVenture open house Saturday at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport.