

Mt. Vernon Airport hosts attempted start for AirVenture Cup racers

Air race sees more than 60 pilots

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Editor's Note: Due to a production error, this story did not run with its accompanying photos in the Wednesday edition of the Sentinel.

MT. VERNON — With a whoosh, dozens of airplanes took to the skies Sunday morning in pursuit of a finish line located states away.

The 2015 AirVenture Cup Cross-Country Air Race began its starting point at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport and featured more than 66 airplanes entered into the race. The final destination for the 18th running of the race was set for the Wausau Downtown Airport in Wausau, Wis.

A storm system settled in just north of the area, so the official starting point was moved to Sterling-Rock Falls. According to WAOW, a news station for north central Wisconsin, there were 66 airplanes entered into the 400-mile race.

Founded in 1997 by Eric Whyte and Erik Anderson, the AirVenture Cup is the a renowned amateur open-circuit air race. The friendly competition first began in Kitty Hawk, N.C., and ended in Oshkosh, Wisc. The starting point was later moved to Dayton, Ohio, and the rules

were changed to where racers flew 400 to 500 miles in a single-day venture.

Mt. Vernon Outland Airport hosted the 2013 race after officials were looking for a more straight and direct flight route to the central Wisconsin destination. The race is held every other year.

Airport Manager Chris Collins said the airport staff and volunteers worked together to provide a hospitable environment for the visiting pilots and tourists.

"The goal is to create the opportunity that they want to come here every other year for this competition," Collins said.

More than just a race, the AirVenture Cup has come to represent the camaraderie that exists among air enthusiasts by replicating the excitement felt from the Bendix trophy races seen in the skies nearly a century ago.

The Bendix Trophy was a famed contest dating back to 1931. The transcontinental point-to-point race was used to urge interested engineers to build faster, more reliable and more durable aircrafts for the competition. Some of the famous competitors who vied for the Bendix trophy include James Doolittle, Amelia Earhart and Jacqueline Cochran.

Pilots traveled from all over to take part in the weekend event. Peter Meszaros arrived from Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, to take part in his first ever AirVenture

race. With the threat of storm looming, he opted out of the race because of how his QAC Quickie Q2 handles rainy weather.

"I've become afflicted with the disease of aviation," said Meszaros, who has been flying for 44 years. "I'm eager to compete and look forward to next time. But to fly in rain is to take the fun out of it."

Meszaros encouraged anyone thinking about flying as a hobby to go for it.

"If you are already thinking about it, you should do it," he said. "Jump in and don't be bothered by it at all."

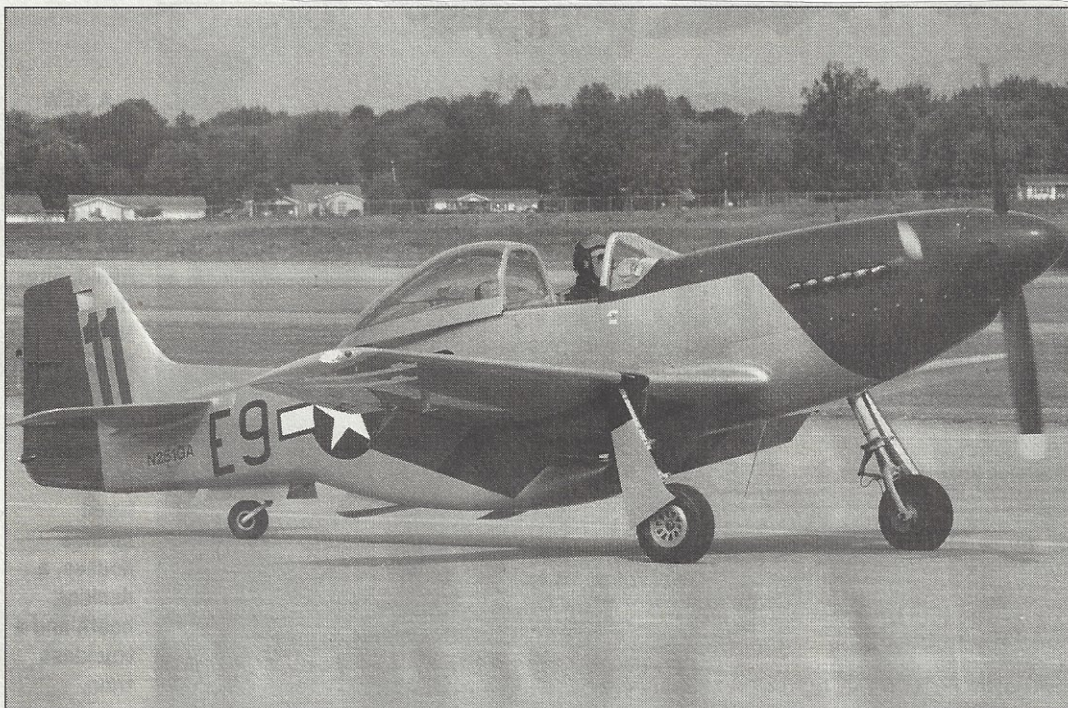
Collins also said hosting the biannual competition's starting point benefits the King City in a number of different ways.

"It's about the perceptual benefits," he said. "We want more events like this to consider the Mt. Vernon airport. It is also about the economics side where these pilots are here and spending money, maybe shopping, right here in Mt. Vernon."

The race start capped off a busy and exciting aviation weekend for the Mt. Vernon airport. Just a day earlier, on Saturday, the Experimental Aircraft Association Young Eagles took 67 young pilots for free airplane rides.

"I want to thank all the volunteers who came out and worked long hours," Collins said. "We've had a lot of people come by and say that everyone was helpful and friendly."

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Sentinel Photo/LEAH WILLIAMS

READY FOR TAKEOFF — Pilot and plane ready for takeoff Sunday from Mt. Vernon Outland Airport during the 2015 AirVenture Cup Cross-Country Air Race.