

Couple buys larger plane for their mission-based aviation organization

By RORYE O'CONNOR

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MT. VERNON — For Rodney and Jana Mullinax, who started Flights for Christ, a mission-based aviation organization, it all began on Jan. 12, 2010.

That was the date of the earthquake in Haiti that killed more than 316,000 people and rendered at least 16 percent of the population homeless.

"When it hit, we knew some people down there, some people working as missionaries," Rodney said. "This catastrophe really hit home for us. We felt a strong need to help the people in Haiti, to be with them."

After much prayer and soul-searching, Rodney and Jana decided that they should use Rodney's ability as a pilot to help Haitians left destitute. Rodney already owned a single-engine plane and was ready to jump in and fly to Haiti to help right away.

But Jana had some reservations.

"She said, 'From here to Florida is dry land, but after that, it's a whole lot of water. I'd feel better if we had two engines, for safety's sake,'" Rodney explained. "The only way we could see to make my dream happen was to sell our home."

So they sold their home and began renting with their two young sons, Quinton and Elias, and purchased a two-engine Cessna 310.

"We are wanting to be the support between Southern Illinois and Haiti and the Dominican Republic," Rodney explained. "We talked and explained to some of the missionaries about what we want to do, and they're excited."

He said he and the five-person board of directors for Flights for Christ plan to take turns, making two to three trips per year, transporting food, medication, missionaries, doctors and nurses to Haiti and bringing anyone back who needs a ride home.

A round-trip flight to a destination such as Port-Au-Prince is about \$1,800, Rodney said in a presentation to the local Experimental Aircraft Association.

The organization hasn't flown to Haiti yet, as they're waiting to be able to purchase an FAA-approved life raft, an item Rodney said was costly.

However, the group has had some practice in altruism by conducting two "compassion flights."

The first trip was from Mt. Vernon to Georgia, to fly a woman to see her son-in-law before he died.

"She found out her son-in-law had terminal cancer, and she wanted to get down there quickly," Rodney explained.

"Everything worked out and she was able to be with him for 10 days before he passed."

The second compassion flight Rodney and Flights



Local Cub Scouts thank Rodney Mullinax for the opportunity to see his airplane at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. Mullinax and his wife, Jana, recently bought a two-engine plane in order to fly to Haiti and help earthquake victims through their non-profit organization, Flights for Christ. RORYE O'CONNOR/REGISTER-NEWS

for Christ conducted this year was to transport a man with Alzheimer's home to Charlotte, N.C.

Rodney said the man couldn't fly on a commercial plane because he had episodes of confusion and would get agitated at times.

"We took the father, his son and his nurse down; his nurse went just in case," he said. "We brought the son and nurse back to Mt. Vernon, and he drove his father's things back down to Charlotte."

Though the Mullinax family is committed to

this new life path, it hasn't been without its challenges, Jana said.

"It's been hard seeing it into reality," she said. "We have this big picture, but actually seeing it into reality —"

Rodney interjected, saying the couple is God-fearing and felt they were being called to make the change in their life and use their talents to help others.

"You also have to look at it as, we were blessed with a house for 11 years," he said. "It's — things of this world. We are looking at it like, there's more

good to come out of getting rid of the house than living in luxury."

He said he's excited to be able to help people who are in "desperate need."

"We've talked to missionaries down there, and they said people, just to put some kind of food in their stomachs, are taking sea water and dirt, and making 'dirt cookies,'" he said. "It's hard to comprehend their lives down there. We're excited, knowing we're going to be able to help."

Jana said she is anxious for the first trip down and back to be accomplished.

"Until we take the first trip, it won't be official," she said.

Rodney said Flights for Christ would appreciate the thoughts of the community as it gets started.

"We're not really asking for anything, we're trying to do everything within our budget. But if anyone in the community felt called to donate or contribute, we're not going to turn anyone down.

What donations would do is increase our frequency of trips down there," he said. "The best thing we could have is prayers."