

Midwest LSA Expo returns to Outland Airport

*About 50 planes will fill
airport ramp, volunteers
needed to welcome
exhibitors*

BY TIM JOHNSON
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — The second annual Midwest Light Sport Aircraft Expo will return Sept. 23 to Mt. Vernon Outland Airport.

Airport Director Chris Collins announced the show's return during a Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce luncheon held Thursday at the airport.

There is only one similar show in the country, held in Sebring, Fla., through which light aircraft sellers can offer demonstration flights to prospective buyers.

Two years ago Eric Evans, who sells Jabiru USA aircraft in Mt. Vernon, suggested organizing an exposition here that could emulate the larger Florida show.

"The manufacturers were looking for another venue to have the exposition where you can do demo flights," Collins explained. "They were looking for somewhere that had convenient access, hotel rooms, restaurants and a big airport, and [Chris] said, 'Why not us?'"

Twelve aircraft deals were made as a result of last year's inaugural event, and the opportunity for commerce is drawing many more exhibitors to the upcoming show.

"There were 31 different planes out on the ramp last year," he said. "This year, we have 42 already,

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and I'm still chasing another 10. It's going to be really exciting when you come out here and there's not a vacant spot on that flight line."

Volunteers are needed to offer hometown hospitality to exhibitors, making sure they stay cool and have whatever refreshments they need.

"The job is to be an ambassador, to just go around and check on people," Collins explained.

Between 50 and 100 volunteered last year, and their good will made a lasting impression.

"They told us, 'Boy, we've never been treated like they treat us in Mt. Vernon,'" said Collins, who is trying to bring aircraft manufacturing or assembly jobs to the county by demonstrating the airport's potential as a manufacturing site. "It's paying off. No one takes better care of the exhibitors than our volunteers."

Light sport aircraft are a growing industry because they're relatively inexpensive



Sentinel File Photo/LAUREN DUNCAN

TAKE A LOOK — Visitors to the opening day of the 2009 Light Sport Aircraft Expo peek into the cockpit of an aircraft featured at the event by Magni Gyro USA. The expo returns to Outland Airport Sept. 23.

and require less cost and time spent acquiring a license. The FAA began offering a Sport Pilot certification in 2004 that allows aviators to take to the skies in light aircraft without meeting the same requirements for a regular pilot's license.

Collins thanked the Jefferson County Development Corporation, the JCCC and the city for working with the Air-

port Authority to put the show together.

"I can't stress enough how good this show was last year and how good it's going to be this year," he said.

The event is open to the public and will run from Sept. 23 through Sept. 25. For more information, residents may contact Chris Collins at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport.

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