

LSA vendors impressed by King City welcome

BY TIM JOHNSON
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MT. VERNON — Local volunteers at the 2nd Annual Midwest Light Sport Aircraft Expo have been making a good impression on vendors this week.

"The people here have just bent over backwards to try to make sure that everything we need is taken care of," said aircraft vendor Mike Zidziunas, who flew in to Mt. Vernon Outland Airport from Lakeland, Fla., to show off three deep blue light sport planes. "That, for me, is a big deal."

Zidziunas was shooting the breeze with fellow vendor Jon Hansen of Hansen Air Group, based in Kennesaw, Ga.

Hansen said Airport Director Chris Collins and the roughly 75 volunteers from the local community had done a "darn good job" in making vendors feel welcome.

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Sentinel Photo/TIM JOHNSON

AIRCRAFT EXPO — Salem pilot Richard Lively, **FOREGROUND**, checks out a Cheetah light sport plane flown in from Wisconsin at the second day of the Light Sport Aircraft Expo at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport on Friday.

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The LSA Expo is one of only two events in the country through which light sport aircraft buyers can test aircraft in the air to help them decide on a purchase.

The other event, held in Sebring, Fla., drew more than 175 exhibitors this year, and the two men said they believe the Mt. Vernon show could eventually rival it.

"If you drew a 100-mile circle around here, you've got a lot more population centers than Sebring," Zidziunas said. "You draw a 100-mile circle around Sebring and three sides of that will be water."

They both said they plan to be a part of the show in coming years to help it grow.

"We were here last year, and the weather was crappy, and still we're back this year," Hansen said. "We'll be back next year. I don't care if we only have one person walk by the airplane."

The market for light sport aircraft is growing, as more aviation enthusiasts discover the benefits of being able to fly in limited conditions without having to meet the

same medical and flight qualifications of a private pilot's license.

Manufacturers have been expanding operations to meet that growth, and Collins has been working with the Jefferson County Development Corporation to try to bring one of them here.

JCDC Executive Director Mary Ellen Bechtel delivered a presentation to vendors earlier in the week to highlight the county as a potential site.

"This is to get the manufacturers acquainted with Mt. Vernon and Jefferson County and all the wonderful people here, and the great opportunity for their expansions," Bechtel said. "We hope when they do make a business decision that they consider Mt. Vernon."

Vendors brought 50 planes for show and sell and were able to take customers for test flights despite occasional windiness throughout Wednesday and Thursday.

Collins thanked the many volunteers from several local community organizations, who numbered so many he didn't know what to do with them all.

"We're spilling over with volunteers," Collins said. "I just can't say enough about them."

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