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Des Moines school's aviation students get very classy classroom aid: A Learjet

Donated Learjet will be used in aircraft maintenance instruction

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Jordan Clark, 18, a senior from Van Meter High School, guides Central Campus' Learjet into position Thursday at the Des Moines airport. "It's going to be pretty cool working on it," he said afterward. / Rodney White/Register photos

Written by JANET KLOCKENGA

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A first-class training tool for high school aviation and technology students landed Thursday afternoon at Des Moines International Airport — a Learjet.

Students enrolled in the Aviation Engineering Technology program through Central Campus will use the jet as a tool as they study aircraft maintenance in the program's lab at the airport.

The school district paid \$4,000 for the jet using money from the program's budget. U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley helped the district obtain the jet, a surplus military transport plane from Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Miss. It will join eight other aircraft students use to learn airplane mechanics.

The district's aviation program is one of only three high school programs in the nation certified by the Federal Aviation

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The jet is a surplus military transport plane, acquired for \$4,000. The school's aviation program is the only one of its kind in the nation to have such an aircraft. / Rodney White/The Register

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Administration to teach aircraft maintenance. The program is the only one of its kind among the nearly 4,000 school districts in several Midwestern states.

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"We try to give students real-life experiences and equipment to work on," said program director Jerry Bradley, adding the plane would normally cost more than \$3 million. "It's a fully operational C-21 Lear 35. It's being used by a lot of different companies, organizations and corporations. Students can learn from modern, current, up-to-date technology."

Bradley said his program is the only one of its kind in the nation with a Learjet.

"At a time when science and technology education has never been more important, we are providing students in Des Moines with a hands-on, high-tech learning experience that will prepare them

for great opportunities after high school," Bradley said.

Bradley said students can earn up to 44 hours of college credit in the three years they spend in the program. During the final 15 weeks, they work on an F-16 Fighting Falcon under the direction of technicians with the 132nd Fighter Wing of the Iowa Air National Guard.

Enrolled in the program are 55 high school and college students, who have two instructors — Bradley and Rick Graves.

A ceremony Thursday at the airport attracted about a dozen students from the program, along with their families, some Iowa National Guard members and Grassley.

Jordan Clark, 18, a senior in the program from Van Meter High School, was selected to direct the jet up to the hangar before the ceremony.

"I was actually shaking a little," he said afterward. "It's going to be pretty cool working on it."

Brandon McGill, 16, a student from East High School, said the program provides a broad range of training.

"You learn how to weld, how to rivet," he said. "It sets you up for

work in other fields.”

“That knowledge looks good on job applications,” added Chandler Baty, 16, a student from Lincoln High School.

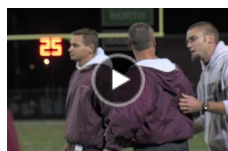
Ryan Chandler, 18, of Runnells completed the program last year. Now he’s enrolled at Indian Hills Community College in Ottumwa, working on an aviation pilot degree. He wishes he’d had the opportunity to work on a Learjet, he said.

“This is great,” he said. “They’re going to get a lot more up-to-date experience. It’s a great opportunity. Hopefully, they’ll use it well.”

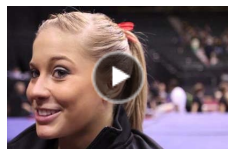
Grassley praised the students and the aviation program. “This is a learning environment,” he told the crowd. “This field fills a very needed occupation deficit in this country.”

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