

Future pilot shortage, meet future pilots

Mark Newman Jul 24, 2017



Courier file photo

Area youngsters prepare for an airplane flight at Ottumwa Regional Airport. A predicted shortage of professional pilots has advocates working to inspire the next generation.



OTTUMWA — If there won't be enough airline pilots in the future, it may be wise to inspire a new generation of pilots.

A nonprofit business started by the Department of Transportation has been introducing youngsters to the possibility of flying as a job. In Ottumwa alone, Iowa Aviation Promotion Group found 50 children looking for an introduction to the field of aviation.

"We're full," said Chuck McDonald, a spokesman for the commission. "Now we're starting a wait list, and it's getting long, too."

The kids, starting as young as 8 but no older than 15, will be at the 2017 Aviation Youth Rally on Aug. 5 at the Indian Hills Community College North Campus — adjacent to the airport.

"Pilots will give participants a short introductory flight," McDonald said.

As long as the weather holds up, that may be the most popular part of youngsters' "exposure to aviation over the course of a morning."

It's more in depth, however: "Ground school" will be conducted by Indian Hills flight instructors. Hills aviation department is known statewide.

"They've got a premier program down there. They will provide three different ground-based sessions," McDonald said.

During their day, kids will see airplanes, flight simulation, aircraft maintenance demonstrations of flight science. Children were required to apply, however there is no charge for the half-day program. And the promotion board is witnessing results.

"We've been doing it long enough now that we've been getting word of [past participants] who have gone on to study and work in aviation."

This is one of four such camps for 2017.

"Here in Ankeny, we had 40 youths at the airport last week," McDonald said.

The fact that Fly Iowa will be in the neighborhood helped Ottumwa get picked to host such a camp, he added. Pilots giving flights to the 50 youngsters are all volunteers.

"People in aviation have a big enthusiasm for the field. For the future, we're developing a pilot shortage. Growth of the airlines and more passengers combined with a mandatory retirement age of 65 for pilots means there are going to be job openings and good salaries."

Reporter Mark Newman can be contacted at mnewman@ottumwacourier.com and followed on Twitter @couriermark.