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Iowa Lakes hosts inaugural aviation day

Tuesday, May 5, 2015
by Brandon Hurley – Staff Writer



(Photo by Brandon Hurley) The first ever Iowa Lakes aviation day was held Thursday, April 30 at the Estherville Airport. High school students from Spirit Lake, Okoboji, Spencer, Armstrong, Ruthven-Ayrshire and Estherville-Lincoln learned of possible aviation careers, the science behind flying and even took a flight over Estherville. [[Order this photo](#)]

As a graduate of the Iowa Lakes aviation program, Paul Haverhals believed he was destined for a high-octane life as a fighter pilot in the Army. Little did he know, he'd soon become a helicopter pilot taking on fire during flights in Afghanistan and Iraq. He went on to become a medical pilot for a regional hospital.

Haverhals' story is just one of many in the distinctive career field of aviation. Jobs are also available as plane mechanics, flight instructors, crop dusters and corporate airplane pilots.

Iowa Lakes Community College's first ever aviation day was held Thursday, April 30, at the Estherville Airport. The event was funded by a state grant and allows students to network and explore additional career learning opportunities.

Molly Bates, Iowa Lakes Community College Intermediary Connections Coordinator, created the new aviation program.

"We wanted to let students understand what type of careers there are in aviation and let them learn about the different components of it and actually let them fly in a plane," Bates said.

The students from Spirit Lake, Okoboji, Spencer, Ruthven-Ayrshire and Estherville-Lincoln Central learned the science behind aviation including weather patterns and flight plans.

"The students were actually able to talk with and see several different people from the area that fly, what positions they have and what type of career they have," Bates said. "This was open to all students in the five-county area and we had about 25 students. This is a great event to let (students) learn about the aviation careers and meet people in the field. We hope to have this happen each spring."

Haverhals, a 2002 Iowa Lakes graduate, now pilots the Sanford Health of Sioux Falls medical helicopter. He flew the hospital chopper down south for the day to meet the area students. The certified flight instructor enlisted in the Army flight school, hoping to become a pilot. He was ordered to become a helicopter pilot with no experience and recalls an initial test.

"Within 25 seconds I had it completely out of control and the instructor had to take

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over," Haverhals said. "I was humbled. Here I am a flight instructor and can't even handle this little helicopter. That just shows you that it is very, very difficult to learn."

Haverhals served in Afghanistan and Iraq as a military helicopter pilot – taking on fire during several different flights. He's been a member of the Sanford intensive air crew for the past three years.

"When you're flying a helicopter you have to keep both hands and both feet busy," Haverhals said. "It's constant movement and makes it very difficult to hover."

The twin engine helicopter is suited for hospital platforms with a maximum flying weight of 7,000 pounds. Haverhals and his crew usually cover a radius of one hour's flight time in South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska. The helicopter staff includes a resident medic and nurse on every flight. The chopper can land on any flat, level surface.

"It's pretty good helicopter and is easily maneuverable," Haverhals said. "We can land anywhere as long as it's flat, on highways and in fields, even in your front yard, if we need to."

The \$7.5 million chopper is in its third year of operation with the Sioux Falls hospital. This particular chopper is specially fitted with a medically-safe floor, defibrillators and surgical equipment.

A career as a medical helicopter pilot was just one of many exciting opportunities discussed during Thursday's program.

"For me, it was exciting to see the students come out here (to the Estherville airport) and see some of the different aircrafts," Bates said. "It's not something we get to see every day."

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