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Iowa 99s women spread their wings in Le Mars

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By Joanne Glamm

Modern-day Amelia Earharts landed at the Le Mars Airport Sunday.

The women pilots are members of the Iowa 99s, according to state chapter chairwoman Minnetta Gardinier, of Iowa City.

The Iowa group draws its name from a national gathering in 1929 in Long Island.

Ninety-nine women, who were licensed pilots, came to the meeting, Gardinier said. One of the original group's founders was Amelia Earhart, an American aviation pioneer.

Promoting women in aviation is the purpose of the 99s.

"It's a fact that even today women are still really a small minority in aviation," Gardinier said. "If you have 100 pilots in a room, only about six would be women."

The Iowa chapter of the 99s meets around the state to get a little more visibility, Gardinier said.

Iowa 99s member Carol Berg, of Marshalltown, suggested the Le Mars Municipal Airport destination for an ice cream treat at the Blue Bunny Ice Cream Parlor.

Berg was the first Iowa 99s member to land a plane at the airport Sunday.

"Most of our members live in the central to the eastern side of the state so we don't actually get over often enough to the western side of Iowa," Gardinier said.

This was the first time the historic group flew into Le Mars, Le Mars Airport Manager Earl Draayer said. Draayer guided each pilot as she left the runway.

"I wanted to make sure that, when they came to Le Mars, they left with a very good feeling of being welcomed to Le Mars," Draayer said.

Four planes piloted by members of the Iowa 99s landed at the airport.

"It's the first time I've flown here," Gardinier said. "I landed on a really nice runway."

Recreational flying is the role of aviation in the lives of many of the Iowa 99s, Gardinier said.

The University of Iowa faculty member and associate dean began taking flying lesson in 2003.

"I've always been a fan of aviation and space -- I was a geeky kid that loved to watch the space shots and landing on the moon," Gardinier said.

Gardinier's mother worked in a food industry that supplied meals to airlines.

"As a result, we got to fly as kids," she recalled.

Today, she pilots a 1978 Cardinal Classic built by Cessna. Gardinier and another University of Iowa faculty member own the plane.



Minnetta Gardinier, of Iowa City, lands a plane at the Le Mars Municipal Airport. Gardinier made the flight Sunday with the Iowa 99s, which is a group of women in aviation.

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She hopes the information on the groups' website www.iowa99s.org might encourage women in aviation to join the 23-member chapter.

"One of the main focuses of the 99s is to promote women going into aviation and to provide networking opportunities for women pilots because we're kind of few and far between," Gardinier said.

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