

Ottumwa seizes its opportunity to shine

Aug 30, 2017



Ottumwa had a fantastic opportunity to show off this past weekend with Fly Iowa's visit. In our not-so-humble opinion, we think the community pulled it off.

On Friday evening we spoke with one man who goes to Fly Iowa every year to photograph the event. When we asked about the turnout, he said he was impressed. Friday is apparently the slow day most of the time, and the crowd that came out for the night air show was a good one in his view.

That's particularly impressive given the fact Fly Iowa had so much competition that night. The first game at the (mostly) renovated Schafer Stadium attracted football fans and OCCP had its production of "Alice in Wonderland."

Strong crowds followed on Saturday. Sunday started slow, but by the time the air show took off there was a good audience waiting. An estimated 20,000 people attended over the course of the three days.

It was a treat to see a Stearman biplane back at the airport after so many were stationed there as part of the Naval Air Station. The B-25, Mustang and Zero were impressive, and seeing those old warbirds fly was something those who saw it won't soon forget.

Other planes from that era were parked during Fly Iowa, but that gave people the opportunity to get up close and see planes that are, in some cases, among the few of their type still flying. The Commemorative Air Force outdid itself in helping bring history to life.

The stunt pilots lived up to the hype, pulling off tricks that occasionally looked like they defied physics. Years of training and sharpening skills were on display, and the result was spectacular. The same can be said of the model airplanes that flew when the air show wasn't taking place. They clearly weren't your grandfather's models.

It was obvious to us that Fly Iowa generated enthusiasm from a large cross section of the community. From young children to elders who remembered when B-25s were still rolling off the factory lines, it looked to us like everyone was having fun. Not too many events can claim to have that kind of wide appeal.

Fly Iowa deserves to take a bow. We want to thank them for giving Ottumwa the chance to show off the airport facilities. We hope they'll be back in a few years.

The organizers deserve their own bow. Archangel was ready for the turn in the spotlight. The committees pulled together what felt like just the right number of food options, had the vendors spaced to allow a good flow through their stalls.

Everyone knew Fly Iowa would be an opportunity to bring attention to Ottumwa's airport, but the line between an opportunity taken and an opportunity missed can be thin. There's no question this was one that was seized tightly.

The implications are significant. Organizers spoke openly about the possibility of putting together an annual air show in Ottumwa, and using Fly Iowa as a springboard. That hope seems to have a real chance of success now.

Ottumwa has risen to the occasion in successive years with RAGBRAI, the Babe Ruth World Series and now Fly Iowa. The community has come together to make these events a success. We all carp about things in southeast Iowa on occasion, but remember the past 18 months next time you're tempted to complain too much. When given the opportunity to shine, Ottumwa did just that.

One other thing: Pam Kaupins, take a break. You've earned it.