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Students immersed in aviation possibilities

Annual exploration day draws 75 area students

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From the early flying successes of Orville and Wilbur Wright in the early 1900s, thousands have flocked to flying lessons.

On Thursday, high school students interested in aviation descended on the Estherville Municipal Airport for the Iowa Lakes Community College's annual Aviation Exploration Day.

Students had the opportunity to ride in an airplane and check out planes adapted for crop dusting, aerobatics and transport. They also learned about opportunities in the aviation field.

Article Photos



The students also were immersed about all things aviation including radars, weather patterns and flight plans.

Autumn Larsen, the college's intermediary connections coordinator, talked about the event.

"This provides experience from a lot of different areas of aviation including commercial, military, acrobatic and crop dusting," she said.

Students came from Estherville Lincoln Central, Emmetsburg, West Lyon, Algona, Spirit Lake, Okoboji, North Union, Harris-Lake Park, Central Lyon, Spencer and Hartley-Melvin-Sanborn schools as well as from Jackson, Minn., and Mapleton, Minn.

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One of the highlights of the event was students being able to hear from Aaron McCartan, the current U.S. Champion in Advanced Aerobatics.

McCartan talked about his experiences in competing abroad. This summer, he will be traveling to Romania to represent the U.S. in the World Aerobatic Championship competition.

McCartan, who now has three children at home, said after this year he looks to start training other pilots and give back some of the knowledge he has learned to help create safe pilots.

McCartan said there are over 10,000 tricks that can be done in aerobatic competition. One of his tricks that he can do with his aircraft is fly backwards.

Students waiting their turn to try out the flight simulator at the airport had the opportunity to listen to Ron Duer, assistance professor of the aviation programs, talk about his long career of flying.

He learned to fly during the Vietnam War era, but he was one of a handful of pilots stationed in Germany during that time.

"There's lots of benefits to being in the military and one of them is flying," said Duer.

Duer said there were many who wanted to be military pilots during the 1960s and he only had to stay in the service for 6 years.

"If you go into pilot training today, you have to sign up for at least 10 years," Duer said. "Pilots are needed. "We had a lot of pilots in Vietnam-so many that they didn't encourage you to stay. Now they don't have enough pilots so there are a lot of incentives to become pilots."

The planes that Duer flew are still some of the fastest. He said that planes today are more often built for stealth rather than speed.

He also talked about the G-suit that protects a pilot during flight. He said the purpose of the suit is to make sure you receive enough oxygen.

He described a training experience when he was in a dogfight situation with his instructor when he created 9 Gs of pressure.

"I weighed 200 pounds in a G-suit. At 9 Gs, I weighed 1,800 pounds," Duer said.

He said the suit blows up a like a balloon and the blood is kept in the upper part of the body.

When Duer was training, he was told that it cost about a million dollars to train him and he had a \$100 flight helmet, which he had on display.

"Now an F-35 costs \$1 billion and the helmet costs \$350,000 with all its electronic inputs," he said.

Mary Trent, the Northwest Iowa STEM manager said her office at Iowa Lakes is to partner with intermediaries to get students interested in aviation that wouldn't normally.

"This event gives kids a hands on experience and also promotes the aviation program at Iowa Lakes," Trent said.

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