

Volunteer pilots help develop love of flying in youth in Iowa City

Young Eagles program returns to Iowa City
Municipal Airport



Experimental Aircraft Association member Tom Olson of Cedar Rapids explains how the control surface on the wing operate to nine-year-old Morgan Wilson of Iowa City before taking her on a flight during a Young Eagles program of the Experimental Aircraft Association at the Iowa City Airport on Saturday, June 10, 2017. The nationwide program has given over 2 million youth between the ages of 8 and 17 their first ride in an airplane for free. (Cliff Jette/The Gazette),

Alexandra Connor

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IOWA CITY — A mother and daughter clapped hands in anticipation of being the first in line Saturday morning at the Iowa City Municipal Airport.

They were among the dozens of families with young children who turned out to take to the skies as part of the Young Eagles program.

“You’re flying?” Connie White, event coordinator, asked one young girl waiting in line to sign a waiver. “Are you anxious?”

Another volunteer weighed in: “Once you get going, you’ll be really excited.”

White and her husband Ron have been participating in the Young Eagles program — organized through the Experimental Aircraft Association — for the last 15 years. The program, which dates back nearly 25 years, offers free 15- to 30-minute airplane rides to children ages 8 to 17 and also aims to educate them about the aircraft.

“Basically what we try and do is take the kids up for a ride and if they are prone to do so, we explain to them how the airplane flies,” said Ron White, who has been flying for 51 years.

Ahead of being taken into the airplane, the pilots take the Young Eagles around and explain to them the functions of the various controlling systems of the aircraft and what they do.

“Once we get up and get going, we give them a feel of the stick or the wheel,” he added.

While flying, the pilots usually ascend to about 2,500 feet.

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“The real young ones get extremely excited,” Ron White said. “When we get out of the airplane, they go, ‘Dad, that’s awesome. He let me fly it.’ ”

An annual event, Young Eagles across Eastern Iowa flies an average of 30 to 80 children each year as the program coordinates with pilots across Iowa to host the flights.

Connie White said most of the pilots have flown hundreds of children over the years.

She said that depending on how busy the pilots are, children often get to fly over their house or farm.

On Saturday, there were about five planes on hand.

After their flights, children interested in aviation were invited to meet other pilots and the airport staff to learn more about safety, planes and aviation opportunities.

Dispatcher Keith Williams also handed out certificates to those who flew.

“People think of flying in different ways but as an instructor, one of the things that is pretty neat is that people end up doing things that they never would have believed they could do,” Williams said.

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