

## Five pilots honored with Wright Brothers award

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KEOKUK – It was a somewhat unusual day at the Keokuk Municipal Airport-Lindner Field on Saturday. One of the hangars was filled with people, getting ready to recognize five individuals for 50 years of safe flight, as they received the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award from the Federal Aviation Administration.

Jason Glass with the FAA presided over the ceremony. He said when he does the ceremonies, there's usually one pilot, or perhaps two, but to have five was pretty special.

"Fifty years of anything is worth celebrating," Glass said. "Having known most of them, it was a real honor."

After a lunch in honor of the recipients, the awards ceremony began. First up for the award was Cecil Schenk. Out of the group of recipients, he has been flying the longest.

Glass said Schenk, 93, took interest in flying at 10 years old when his uncle bought an airplane. He took his first solo flight in 1951, so he has been flying far longer than 50 years.

“To say he’s overdue for this award is an understatement,” Glass said.

Schenk used flying to make a living, having a crop dusting business for years.

Glass shared a letter from Kyle Thurston, office manager of the FAA’s Des Moines Flight Standard District Office or FSDO. The letter shared the FAA’s appreciation of the pilots and their service to aviation throughout the years.

The pilots had their wives or other relative pin them with their award. Each pilot was also issued their blue ribbon copy of their flight records, a certificate of the award along with a plaque. Each spouse or other relative also was given a pin and letter from the FSDO office.

Donald Lindholm also has been flying since the 1950s, taking his first solo flight on Oct. 20, 1954. His time as a pilot isn’t incident-free.

He shared a story from 1955, when he was 16 and was flying a friend’s plane. He was over West Des Moines and the engine in the plane broke apart. The windshield was covered in oil and he watched the wooden propeller fly by.

“So it’s quiet and I’m 16,” he said. “I started looking for a tree to jump into. Fortunately, I didn’t and landed and everything was OK.”

Up next was Arnold Spersflage. Glass said he would have to call him Arnie, since he’s known him for decades, but it was an honor to present him with the award.

Spersflage got interested in aviation as a young boy by watching his neighbors fly over in their Piper Cub. He had his first solo flight on Sept. 25, 1966. He not only is a pilot, but a skydiver and parachute rigger. He is still putting in about 100 hours a year behind the controls.

Dennis Morton took his first solo on April 4, 1963. He got his private pilot’s license and went on to get instrument rated. He went to college for a few years, then switched gears and went to be trained as a flight instructor.

During the Vietnam War, he enlisted in the Air Force and became a flight instructor there for jets. After the war, he flew for Ozark Airlines, that got acquired by TWA, which then got acquired by American.

Glass told those in attendance, that he has been up to 52,000 feet and has seen the curvature of the earth.

“You’re not supposed to go above 50,000 in that plane, but I had to do it,” Morton said.

Morton’s flight records were about the thickness of a book, showing how diverse his career has been in aviation.

Robert McDowell had his first solo flight in 1970. Glass said he is very active in the Keokuk airport, serving on the airport commission. He said he always liked to help with the L-Bird fly ins when those were taking place.

McDowell also has built a plane, putting it on floats.

Glass wrapped up the ceremony saying in Iowa, there are 108 recipients of the award and 10 percent of those are in the southeast corner of Iowa.

To be eligible for the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award, nominees must:

- Hold a U.S. Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) or Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) pilot certificate.
- Have 50 or more years of civil and military piloting experience or 50 or more years combined experience in both piloting and aircraft operations.
- Up to 20 years of the required 50 years may be U.S. military experience.
- The effective start date for the 50 years is the date of the nominee's first solo flight or military equivalent.
- The 50 years may be computed consecutively or non-consecutively.
- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Have NOT had any airman certificate revoked.