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TOP STORY

New plane to enhance learning in Iowa Western aviation maintenance program

Mike Brownlee
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The 1981 Piper Cheyenne 2XL, which was donated to Iowa Western Community College's aviation technology program by Omaha physician Robert Faulk, is pushed into the school's hangar at Council Bluffs Municipal Airport on Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020.

New plane to enhance learning in Iowa Western

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Mike Brownlee

As the newest addition to Iowa Western Community College aviation technology department's fleet of airplanes, taxied to its new home, a group of students excitedly watched before jumping into action to get the bird in the college's hangar.

Robert Faulk, an Omaha physician, donated the 1981 Piper Cheyenne 2XL on Thursday, giving the program its newest, nicest plane to help enhance students' work as they prepare for careers in the field.

"I'm hopeful it will benefit the community," Faulk said at the department's home at the Council Bluffs Municipal Airport.

The jubilation wasn't exclusive to students, either.

"It's an exciting day," aviation maintenance instructor Dylan Driscoll said. "This makes a huge difference. This is perfect."

Faulk, who's been flying since 1985, owned the Piper Cheyenne for the last five years. He said finding parts was becoming more difficult and decided, "it was time to do something for the plane."

That "something" was a new home that'll help students advance their career prospects. The Iowa Western program teaches students all aspects of an aircraft -- engines, instruments, flight physics, maintenance rules and regulations, heating and cooling, electricity, metal fatigue and corrosion, propellers and a slew of other aspects, aviation maintenance instructor Eric Ely said.

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"It gives us a whole other plane to explore," Ely said of the gift.

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Driscoll noted that while a 1981 model sounds old, it's not like a used car. Planes must pass certification each year to remain in use.

The Iowa Western program has a number of planes of various conditions, along with replica teaching tools. The instructors said they're thrilled to have another air-worthy plane, this one a twin-turbo engine. The real deal.

"The real thing is always better," Driscoll said. "We can use this for 20 to 30 subject areas."

Once students start working on it the plane can't be flown, per Federal Aviation Administration rules. It could fly again if purchased from the school, with the new owner having it inspected and certified for flight.

New plane to enhance learning in Iowa Western

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"We'll keep it flight-worthy as much as we can. But this is a training facility, mistakes will be made -- which is expected," Ely said. "They make mistakes here, so they don't make them in the field."

The Iowa Western program is the largest in the region. There are also programs at Indian Hills Community College in Indianola and Western Nebraska Community College in Sidney, Nebraska, along with an Aviation Institute of Maintenance in Kansas City, Missouri.

"Something new, something we didn't have before," second-year student Kaine Smith said Thursday.

Smith was among a group of students that came for arrival, though they didn't have to be there -- Iowa Western's on winter break until Jan. 11.

"It's new and exciting," Smith said. "It's very generous of the Faulks."

Learn more about the Iowa Western aviation technology program at [iwcc.edu](https://www.iwcc.edu).

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