

[https://www.nwestiowa.com/news/sioux-center-teen-earns-pilots-license/article\\_dfea1778-7633-11eb-a84c-c35839fe5487.html](https://www.nwestiowa.com/news/sioux-center-teen-earns-pilots-license/article_dfea1778-7633-11eb-a84c-c35839fe5487.html)

FEATURED

## Sioux Center teen earns pilot's license

Lydia Hansen lhansen@nwestiowa.com

Feb 24, 2021



Evan Van Donselaar, a senior at Western Christian High School, earned his private pilot's license last October. He spent five months last summer and fall learning to fly and hopes to become a commercial pilot after college.

**SIOUX CENTER**—Evan Van Donselaar doesn't like heights, but the 17-year-old loves flying enough to become a pilot.

Van Donselaar, a senior at Western Christian High School in Hull, earned his private pilot's license in October after five months of study and flight practice.

"It's a little nerve-racking, but once you're in the air and you're actually flying the plane, it's just an extraordinary feeling," he said. "Once you get that rush of adrenaline, I was hooked right away."

His interest surprised even himself, Van Donselaar admitted.

He had never considered aviation before or had any particular interest in planes, but in his junior year he started thinking seriously about possible career paths. An offhand conversation with friends last spring got him thinking about aviation.

"I remember it just got brought up in like a group of friends, just the idea of flying, and it kind of started working in my brain," he said. "A few weeks later it kind of clicked, 'This is what I want to do.' It was kind of random, but it just hit me, this is the thing I should be doing."

Van Donselaar did his flight training at the Sioux County Regional Airport east of Maurice through AirFlair Inc., which provides flight instruction and other aircraft services.

He started with flight instructor Rachel Vander Schaff in mid-June and wrapped up his flight test after about five months of studying.

Although time in the cockpit was important — he had almost 60 hours of flight experience before he tested for his private pilot's license — Van Donselaar also spent long hours reading about and studying aviation.

"There were times in the first few weeks where I'd sit down during the summer hours or when we had online school and I just sat down and clocked six hours of studying for different aviation materials," he said. "You have to be really diligent in your work. So it kind of hit me really hard how much you have to study and be in the books."

Van Donselaar said the coronavirus pandemic surprisingly helped him earn his pilot's license quickly. When school moved online in the spring, he hit the books to study aviation. Canceled activities throughout the summer and into the fall gave him more time to focus on getting flight experience and preparing for tests.

"By having the time to do that, I was diligent in my work which allowed me to always be productive," Van Donselaar said. "No one wanted a pandemic, but I tried to make the best out of it and capitalize out of the time that was given to me."

He flew two to three times a week during the spring and summer, depending on the weather. Most flights were an hour or two, although he did one much longer flight from Sioux Center to Omaha, NE, to practice cross country flying.

He remembers some major milestones of that journey, including his first landing, which did not go as smoothly as anticipated.

“I kind of messed it up a little bit and was overshooting to the right, and my instructor had to take over the controls and she ended up fixing it quick enough so that we landed safely,” Van Donselaar said. “My heart, it was racing so fast. I was so nervous for my first landing.”

Another memorable moment was his first solo flight, which he made after about 20 hours of instruction.

“Once you’re in the air by yourself and you kind of look around and you’re like, ‘I’m flying the plane all by myself.’ It’s just, it’s true joy, really.”

Although he still does not like heights, Van Donselaar said that does not bother him when he’s in a plane and concentrating on flying. He also changed his mind about turbulence, which he used to dislike.

“I love turbulence now,” he said. “It makes flying fun. When you’re in the small plane you really feel it. If you like it, it’s a fun time.”

After he got his license, Van Donselaar spent a few weeks taking friends and family up in the plane to show what he’d learned.

One of his passengers was Western Christian High School head administrator Brian Verwolf.

“I loved the thrill,” Verwolf said. “I had no idea what I was getting myself into, so I asked Evan a ton of questions throughout the process. When we were up in the air I think I was asking him too many questions, and he said, ‘Can you just be quiet for a minute?’, because he had to focus.

Verwolf added that he was proud of how Van Donselaar managed his regular school load while pursuing his license.

After high school, Van Donselaar plans to attend a four-year university and major in flight science. His end goal is to become a commercial pilot and fly for different airlines.

In the meantime, he continues to fly, although not as often as before.

“I try to stay current and just get practice in,” he said. “I like to go every two and a half or three weeks.”

### At a Glance:

Name: Evan Van Donselaar

Age: 17

Residence: Sioux Center

Education: Senior at Western Christian High School

Activities: Member of Western Christian High School's Student Council Leadership Team, leader for Young Peoples Society at Faith Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, employee at Pizza Ranch in Sioux Center.

Family: Parents Brian and Carey; brother, Garth, 24; and sister, Jasmine, 21.

Interests: Refereeing soccer, playing basketball, watching sports, flying and being outside.

### MORE INFORMATION



📷 +2

School enrollment ebbs in N'West Iowa

Wiersma talks foundations at Western  
Sheldon elementary students take charge

Lydia Hansen