

Student pilots get a taste of flight

By Steve Kadel
Correspondent

Taylor Fendall climbed out of a four-seat airplane and walked off the Sisters Eagle Airport tarmac with a big grin on his face.

“That was crazy!” the Sisters High School (SHS) freshman exclaimed to a friend.

He referred to a 20-minute trip on Saturday, December 3, as part of the school’s flight curriculum. It wasn’t just a sightseeing excursion. Instead, Fendall got a chance to commandeer the aircraft for a period during the stint above Sisters.

“I had it most of the time,” he said with some pride.

A strong crosswind made the conditions challenging, especially upon landing. The Outlaw Aviation Cessna 172 in which Fendall rode was piloted during takeoff and landing by airport co-owner Benny Benson.

“This plane is very nimble, so a crosswind like this can make it thrilling,” Benson said. “This is a good day for people who like roller coasters.”

There were a few anxious seconds when one wing raised up, then dipped while the other raised, as his plane was buffeted by wind during landing.

About 10 SHS flight students enrolled in the Flight Science classes at SHS got a chance to fly in a private single-engine airplane on Saturday. The owners of the aircraft are members of

the Experimental Aircraft Association’s chapter at Sisters Eagle Airport. The organization introduces youths to aviation through the Young Eagles program. The pilots donate their time, fuel and airplanes to give students the experience — all at no cost to the student.

“We’re lucky to have so many pilots in Sisters willing to bring their planes out and spend time with the kids,” said Julie Benson, also a pilot and co-owner of the airport. “The support from the pilot community is what makes the aviation program so successful. We have over 20 pilots who have volunteered to do Young Eagles flights for the high school students.”

This is the fourth year since the program was started that Young Eagles flights have been available to SHS students.

Prior to the recent flights, the pilots worked with each student one on one, showing them how a pre-flight inspection is done. They walked around the entire airplane while the pilot demonstrated what needs to be checked before taking to the air.

“It’s not like a car where you can just jump in and go,” said pilot Jon Renner, who helped pioneer the SHS aviation program as the first flight-science teacher. He likened flying in the wind to boating on choppy waters, saying, “Except in an airplane, you have more control.”

Benny and Julie Benson emphasized that students were

not obligated to fly in the windy conditions. They and Sheryl Yeager, who teaches SHS’ flight science curriculum this year, emphasized there would be more chances in the future.

“If you’re not comfortable, there’s no shame in that because it is bouncy,” Yeager said.

“If you want a smooth day, today’s not the day,” Benny Benson agreed. “Welcome to winter.”

But Fendall didn’t hesitate, prompting his father, Neil, to say, “He would go if there was a hurricane.”

The other students eagerly followed his example. For some, including freshman Ramsey Schas, it was the first time in an airplane. She



PHOTO BY STEVE KADEL

Ramsey Schas’ expression shows her exhilaration after the first airplane flight of her life.

came back with an exhilarated expression and said, “That was fun!”

The school’s flight program is aligned with the Experimental Aircraft Association and provides ground-school experience leading to a pilot’s license in addition to flight time with a

certified, experienced pilot. Julie Benson said it’s one of three such high school flight programs she’s aware of nationwide, and the only one that is a public-private partnership.

It can save local students up

See **FLIGHT** on page 26

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