

New flight students take to the air above Sisters

Last Saturday morning, the Sisters Airport was bustling with 25 high school students, numerous parents, and five community volunteer pilots giving Young Eagles flights. The flights in private planes are provided for each student enrolled in the Flight Science Program at Sisters High School (SHS) free of charge, and are intended to give them an inspiring and personal experience of actual flight.

The Flight Science Program has expanded to two full classes in order to meet the growing interest and enrollment of the students.

"We have 32 new students enrolled in the Introduction to Flight Science class this semester, and 24 second-term students in the Private Pilot Preparation course. This is the highest number of students we have flown for a high school Young Eagles event yet," said Sheryl Yeager, the teacher of the classes at SHS, and also an FAA Certificated Flight Instructor (CFI).

Crossing the ranks from student to pilot this year was Tyler Head, an SHS graduate and alumni of the Flight Science Program. Head earned his private pilot certificate last year, and is now attending Central Oregon Community College (COCC) pursuing a degree in aviation. He remembered just a few years ago, as a student taking his first Young Eagles flight, knowing nothing about airplanes. Now he is able to give back to the program that inspired his career path by flying students in his Cessna 170.

"I was a little nervous on my first flight because I've never flown people I don't know, especially kids," he said.

But his skill and proficiency became immediately

apparent on take-off when a deer ran across the runway right in front of Head's plane. He adeptly lifted the plane off the runway, just high enough to clear the deer, but still in ground effect so as not to stall.

"Tyler handled it perfectly. It was a beautiful maneuver," said one of the other pilots.

One of the returning volunteer pilots, Jim Hamilton, was impressed with the graciousness and appreciation shown by the students.

"They were all so excited to fly, and learn about being a pilot. And every one of them looked me in the eye, shook my hand, and thanked me for taking them up in my plane. It was very refreshing to experience their appreciation in today's world," said Hamilton.

"Some of the kids I flew today had never been in any kind of airplane before at all. It was a perfect day for their first flight experience," said Sam Monte, a CFI with Outlaw Aviation. "The demand for pilots is already higher than supply. With the worldwide pilot shortage already impacting commercial flights, I think the program at SHS and Outlaw Aviation offers students an incredible jump into a lucrative career. I foresee the numbers of students interested in our program continuing to grow."

Outlaw Aviation offers substantial discounts and scholarships to SHS students for their flight training.

SHS was one of 72 high schools nationwide selected to receive the new High School Aviation STEM curriculum from AOPA (Airplane Owners and Pilots Association). Schools must apply to use the curriculum and, if accepted, must agree to provide essential data that will be used to track the



PHOTO PROVIDED

Young Eagles took off in flight last Saturday, some of them piloted by an alum of the Outlaw Aviation Program at Sisters High School.

program's effectiveness and impact. Yeager is impressed with the science-based curriculum made available to selected schools free of charge as part of AOPA's commitment to promote aviation education. Yeager is using it in the introductory class, as well as specific sections in the private pilot prep class which prepares students to take the FAA written exam for their private pilot license.

"We are grateful that we were selected. Our program at SHS is now getting national attention as one of the leading high schools in aviation education," she said.

The flight program is also attracting families to Sisters so their kids can participate.

"We had three more families move into the Sisters School District from across the country, even Hawaii, to enroll their high schoolers in our Flight Science Program,

and take advantage of the flight training scholarships at Outlaw Aviation," said Yeager.

The next phase of the SHS Aviation Program is an Airplane Build Project. Benny and Julie Benson, owners of Sisters Eagle Airport, have committed to hosting the class at the airport starting as early as next semester. Julie is in the process of acquiring funding for the airplane components and tools required for the project.

"I'm looking to get funds from a variety of resources, including grants and scholarships, corporate sponsorships, and private donations. The intent is to provide a hands-on project-based environment where students can learn machining and fabrication skills, engine design and maintenance, aircraft engineering design, and electrical skills. The sale of the

completed airplane will fund the next build project, so going forward it will be self-sustaining," said Benson.

"We're also looking for volunteers willing to help instruct and mentor the students. People with experience building airplanes, working on cars and engines, or metal-working are invited to help," said Benson.

"We are very fortunate to have incredible support from the community, as demonstrated by our July 4th fundraiser, and today's Young Eagle flights. I believe we are going to get strong backing for the Build Project as well, once we get the word out on what we're trying to do here," said Benny Benson.

For information on supporting the Airplane Build Project, either with donations or volunteering, contact Julie Benson at Julie@SistersAirport.com.

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