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McNary cadets to learn to fly

By **DEREK WILEY**
Of the Keizertimes

Casey Toavs, a senior at McNary High School, has wanted to fly ever since he first went up in a plane with his father, a flight instructor.

This summer, Toavs and another McNary cadet, Noah Egli, will get their shot.

Both Toavs and Egli have been selected to participate in the first Flight Academy Scholarship Program, where they will attend an aviation program at one of six partnering universities to get a private pilot license.

The scholarship, valued at \$20,000, covers transportation, room and board, academics and flight hours.

The McNary cadets were two of 120 chosen out of more than 800 who applied.

"The dream and the goal was always to become an Air Force pilot and I saw this as a great opportunity and a step to get there," Toavs said.

Egli, who has participated in Young Eagles, a program by the Experimental Aircraft Association in Independence that allows kids to ride in an airplane, always saw the opportunity to fly as nothing but a dream.

"Being able to do this and get a private pilot license, it makes it feel like an actual job I can do in the future instead of it just being a dream," he said.

To get into the program, Egli and Toavs had to take the written Aviation Qualifying Test and take a physical fitness exam, which included a 1-mile run, push-ups, sit-ups, pull-ups and sit reach.

They'll be assigned to one of six universities—the Embry-Riddle Florida campus, Kansas State, North Dakota, Purdue, Liberty or Auburn.

The Flight Academy Scholarship Program is a new Air Force-level initiative in collaboration with the commercial aviation industry to address the national civilian and military pilot shortage. AFJROTC has been charged by the Air Force Aircrew Crisis Task Force to bring back the "luster of aviation" to high school students and increase diversity in aviation fields.

Civilian airline industry experts project a demand for 117,000 new commercial pilots over the next 20 years. The Air Force is currently short of at least 1,500 pilots to fulfill its requirements.

Both Toavs and Egli have been in the Air Force Junior ROTC program at McNary for four years.

"I was a pretty shy kid and I needed an extra class," said Egli, who is now the group commander as well as on the color guard, unarmed and armed drill teams at McNary.

"I thought I might as well take this class and learn some leadership skills and I've definitely grown since my freshman year. It's a very fun class."

Toavs and another McNary cadet are in charge of planning the military ball on



McNary High School seniors Noah Egli and Casey Toavs have been accepted to the Flight Academy Scholarship Program, where they will earn a private pilot license this summer.

April 7 at the Reed Opera House in Salem.

"The want to get into this program here at McNary kind of stemmed from my want to become an Air Force pilot," Toavs said.

"I saw it as another opportunity to help me get where I wanted to go and I also thought it was a good program that I could learn some leadership skills from, which would help me in many aspects of life."

Both cadets plan to participate in ROTC programs in college and then enlist in the military after graduation.

Egli is going to Oregon State University.

Toavs has been accepted to

OSU as well as Embry-Riddle, North Dakota and the University of Portland.

"It's a different perspective looking at the earth from that height," Toavs said.

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