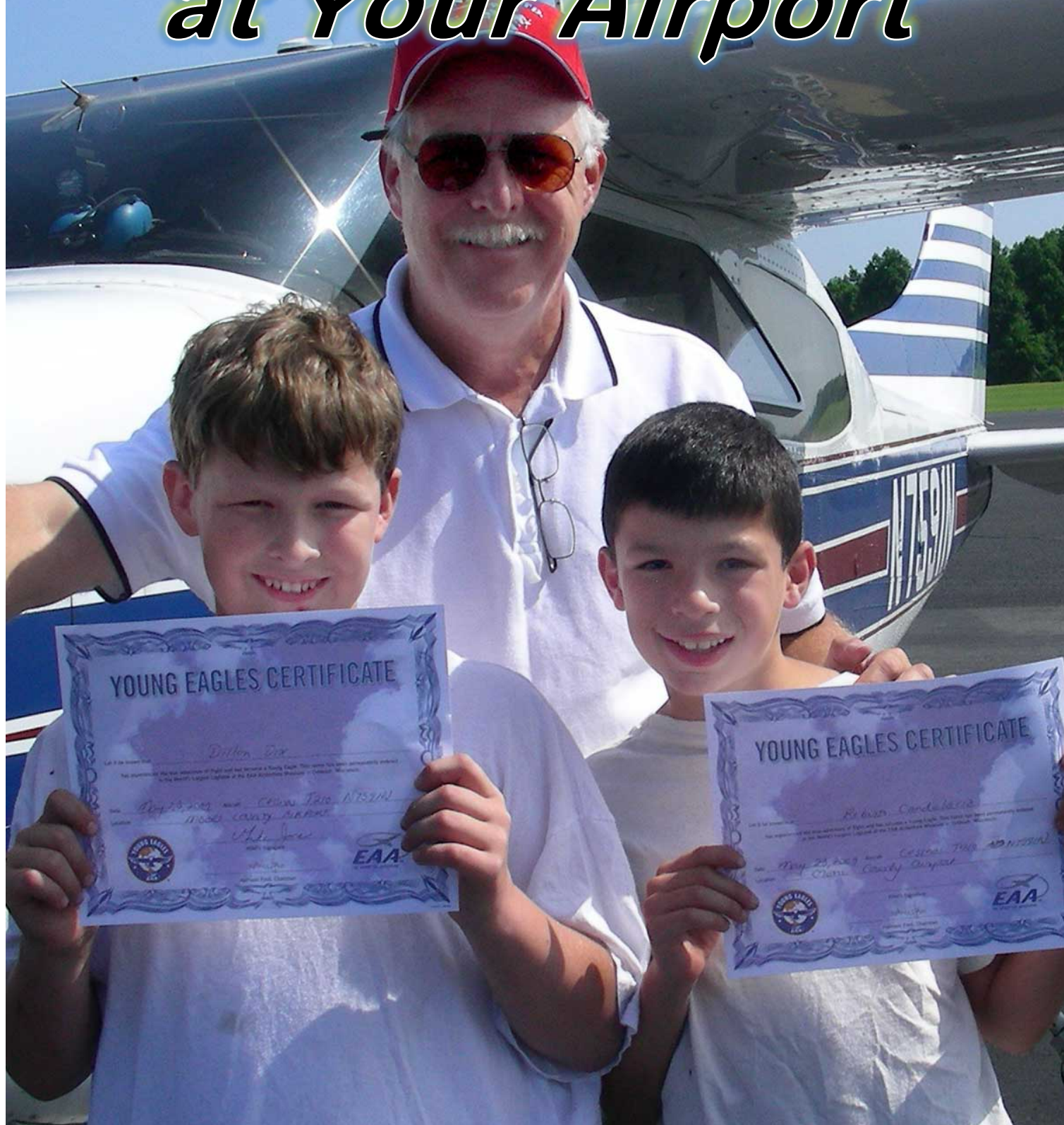


Start a Young Eagles Program at Your Airport



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By Mike Jones

Cessna Pilots Magazine, originally published: October 2018

There are a million ways to have fun with airplanes. There's the famous \$100 hamburger. I've taken friends and flown to the beach. I've flown an abandoned dog to a happy new home in Rhode Island. Nailed my dot on an Oshkosh runway. Even more heart-stoppingly: landed downwind and downhill at Friday Harbor, Washington. I've flown long, lonely nights in crystalline skies with meteors dancing between the stars. But nothing in the cockpit can top the sheer joy of a Young Eagles flight.

The Young Eagles program began in 1992 when the Experimental Aircraft Association developed an out-reach program to give young people a taste of general aviation. More than two million kids have enjoyed Young Eagles flights, which is about 80,000 rides each year. But there are 56 million school kids in the U.S. The Young Eagles program is invisible to 99% of them. We need more exuberant young pilots, which means we need you.

There are about 600,000 active pilots in the U.S. today, down from 800,000 in 1980. The FAA forecasts pilot numbers will continue to slide indefinitely. Brent Owens, a senior corporate pilot and a popular contributor to the "IFly" aviation blog explains, "If our numbers continue to decline the infrastructure will decline along with it and the death spiral will begin. Little airports and

FBOs will continue to shut down. The number of manufactured airplanes will decline. The availability of technicians and parts will dwindle.”

He's right. Fewer pilots means fewer planes. Flying will get more expensive. Avgas will become harder to get. Political clout will evaporate. Runways will become shopping centers. The end, as they say, is near.

One antidote is to start a Young Eagles program at your airport. At my home-drome in central North Carolina, a robust Young Eagles program has flown 6,000 kids over fifteen years. We consistently pack 200 kids into a gaggle of Cessnas, Mooneys, Diamonds, Pipers and light sports in a Saturday. While it's a lot of work, it's also a lot of fun. Here's my recipe to whip up a program at your local field.

Pre-Planning & Publicity

First, you need the five important people to make your program run more smoothly and successfully. First, you need an overall manager with the energy of puppy and the patience of a hungry alligator. This person recruits pilots, solicits sponsors, and coordinates with the airport. You'll also need somebody to write press releases for local newspapers and to speak to community organizations. The Ground Boss trains the non-flying volunteers, sets up the tables, gets the office supplies and drinks more coffee than is healthy. The Air Boss makes the weather call, plans the routes, briefs pilots, checks NOTAMS, and scrambles as pilots come and go. Lastly, there's George. He keeps track of the money. We love George.

At EAA Chapter #1220, we plan two events/year, usually the first Saturdays in May and November. (The following Sunday always is the rain date.) We double-check for conflicts with holidays, high school events, parades and community activities. For example, our airport is adjacent to the local community college. Their graduation is in May and we wouldn't want dozens of airplanes swirling overhead during commencement.



This is the typical flyer used to promote our Young eagles event. We print about a hundred copies and put them in the windows of stores and restaurants, and also circulate them electronically to local schools.

Don't try to operate a Young Eagles rally without EAA insurance. It's easy to get and very inexpensive; your chapter can apply on-line and it takes about thirty days to process the paperwork. Order your Young Eagles supplies such as registration forms, certificates and logbooks at the same time.

In terms of publicity, I have three suggestions. The most affordable marketing tool is an email flyer announcing the event. Make sure the flyer is rich with photos of happy kids, blue skies and sexy airplanes. Email the invitation to

schools, churches, synagogues, scout troops, social clubs, and community organizations like Rotary, VFW and Elks Clubs. We post them in store windows and send our publicity person to local radio stations.

A friendly, photo-filled press release to local papers also is very helpful. Get the critical details in the first paragraph. Another paragraph or two about the fun of flying, aviation careers or a few statistics may be used by the editors if they have the space. Be sure to include the names of any people in the photos. Most newspapers prefer the text as a Word file and the photos as separate, 300 dpi JPG images.

Lastly, street banners are very effective in high-traffic areas. We made four 8x2 foot banners and had them printed by Vistaprint for \$60 each. Each banner screams “Kids Fly Free This Saturday!” Keep the layout simple and large — after all, people are reading them at 45 mph. Do not include a date so you can re-use them year after year. Important tip: order banners with grommets.



A typical street banner used to promote the Young Eagles events. Notice there are no dates on the banner, so it can be re-used.. Banners like this can be produced by on-line services very inexpensively.

The Day Arrives

In terms of pilots, our chapter has nine active pilots plus usually another half dozen from neighboring airports. We reach out to pilots as far as one hour away by air. Recruiting has become challenging due to the background check now required by EAA. You may need to coach volunteer pilots through the clumsy EAA web site; it isn't user-friendly. Before the first flight of the day, make sure every pilot gets a thorough briefing on your local procedures.

We're very fortunate to have a spacious FBO at Pinehurst for our rallies. Junior ROTC cadets from the local high school staff the event in exchange for

rides. They welcome everybody, hand out Young Eagles registration forms, and assign each passenger a sequence number.



The “pairing desk” where kids are matched to planes and pilots. The JROTC cadets staff the welcome desk and this position. The blue-and-white forms are the Young Eagle permission forms. The cadets match the forms with the available seats on each airplane and attach them to the clipboards, which defines when a mission ready to go.

The sequence number system was invented by Jim Murray, our Young Eagles leader, to ensure we serve students on a first-come, first-served basis. The sequence number is scribbled on each kid’s wrist and on the permission form which goes to the “pairing desk.”

The pairing desk builds passenger manifests using clipboards. Each clipboard

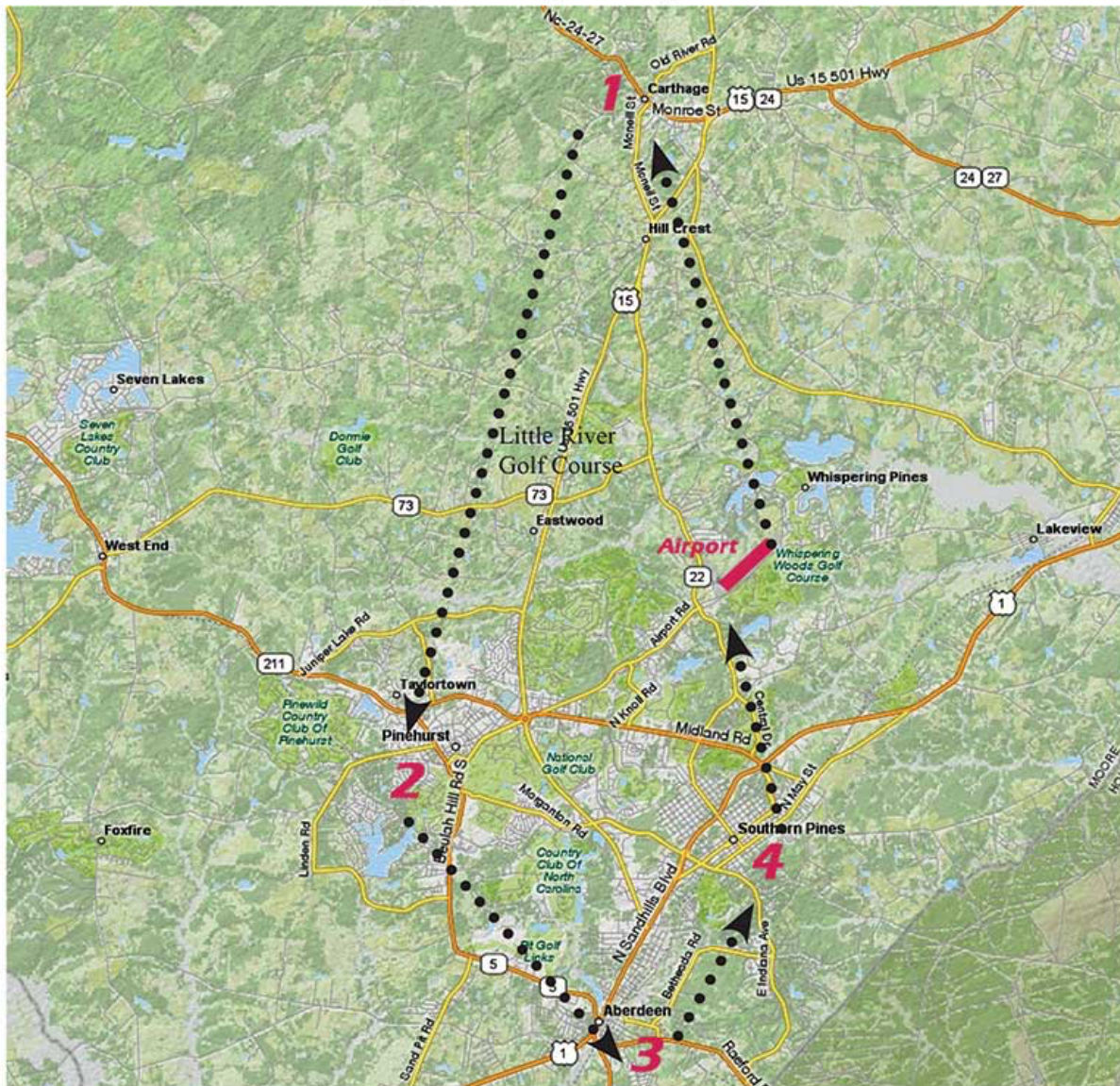
represents one pilot and the number of available seats. When the pilot/plane are ready to go, the pilot simply is given the clipboard. The pilot finds the waiting kids (which can be harder than it sounds), signs the forms and passes the clipboard to the Flight Status desk.

The Flight Status tracking board is another bit of organizational genius by Jim Wiltjer, a retired Delta captain and gifted cabinet-maker. It’s basically a giant white-board partitioned into 100 squares. Each square is a sequence number. When the



The ROTC cadets keep the flight status board up to date. This allows parents to judge when their kids will get their rides. It’s also a nice bit of transparency: everybody can see the numbers as they go out. First to arrive are the first to fly.

Young Eagles Operations at Pinehurst Regional (SOP)



General Procedures

(1) Provide a complete safety briefing to your pax. (2) Teach a little about flying and planes during preflight. (3) Try to fly the route shown, with the four main turns. (4) If possible, let a kid spend a few minutes at the controls. (5) Use the "call sign" YOUNG EAGLES and your tail number. (6) Make position reports at Carthage, Little River, Pinehurst resort, Aberdeen, SoPines, then as you enter the pattern. (6) If an area is congested, do a 360° to clear the area. (7) If you require a runway change, announce your intentions clearly. You're PIC!

Comm and Alts

KSOP AWOS 127.50
KSOP UNICOM 123.05
Do not position report on the
Carthage Unicom of 122.9
Faster aircraft (120 knots): 2,500'+
Slower aircraft (100 knots): 1,500'
Confirm Altimeter on AWOS!!!

Remember Our New Name: It's Now "Pinehurst Traffic"

This is the pilot handout for our Young Eagle events. This sectional map has been tweaked by our Air Boss to identify the suggested route. In most planes this takes about 20 minutes but we often wander off route searching for schools or homes.

sequence number is circled the passenger is flying. An “X” means that flight is completed. Pilots, passengers and parents can estimate waiting times by looking at the board. When we reach Number 100, we erase earlier numbers and add new ones.

We also produce handsome Young Eagles certificates (see cover photo). The certificates are important and are treasured by the kids. We also give each passenger a completed Young Eagles pilot logbook and show them the coupons from Sporty’s for the ground school training.



This is the rack which holds all of the clipboards with the certificates and the logbooks. Having a clipboard on this rack means that flight is in-progress.

The Flight

Our policy is that everybody who wants a ride gets a ride. Heavier kids need to go to bigger planes; that needs to be managed diplomatically. Autistic kids have trouble with headsets but seem to enjoy the trip. Our ramp volunteers lift wheel chair kids into the planes. With patience, it all works.

We strongly suggest every student get a “taste” of pre-flight procedures. This includes reviewing a sectional, completing the “walk around” inspection and identifying the airplane’s controls. As the kids are strapped in everybody gets a full safety briefing, especially on seatbelts and doors. We bring cushions for the shorter kids and always save time for photos.

When it’s time to taxi, every plane identifies itself on UNICOM as a “Young Eagle” flight plus the last three digits of the tail number. The airport remains



Rainy days won't stop a Young Eagle event but low clouds or high winds certainly will. Here, taildragger pilot Jim Murray preflights his Maule while the kids learn about his airplane.

open and Young Eagles traffic mixes easily with incoming jets and other transient flights.

We fly a “canned” route which takes kids over four towns and lasts about twenty minutes. Each plane self-reports at key visual landmarks so everybody retains situational awareness. Slow planes

fly at 1,500 ft. while more burly aircraft cruise at 2,500 ft. Usually the kid riding shotgun will be eager to handle the controls. With older kids, I demonstrate steep turns and offer a brief zero-gravity “roller coaster” experience. Important safety tip: before demonstrating zero gravity, have the child in the co-pilot seat grab their seat belt. It can get really exciting if they grab the yoke!

Overall, every passenger reacts differently. During take-off there's lots of chatter, laughter and sometimes screams. Some kids are glued to their smart phones, posting to Facebook. Occasionally you discover a child who truly is thrilled. One ten-year old announced, “This is the best day of my whole life.” It made me wonder about her 80+ years yet to come.

A recent Young Eagle flight was particularly memorable. Ayesha is an energetic teenager in a burgundy head-scarf who has decided a flying career is in her future. Her family drove from Raleigh — about 60 miles — just so she could have her first flight. She's smart. She listened. She handled the plane well. She quickly grasped the basics of airmanship. Back on the ground, she raced over to inspect a Gulfstream IV which had been opened for visitors. Her dad



A key part of the Young Eagle experience is building great memories for kids and families. We encourage the parents to come to the airplane, listen to the safety briefing, and grab as many photos as they want.

thanked me and said this flight was a jump-start for Ayesha and her dream. Maybe, just maybe, my old Cessna and I made a difference. What more can somebody ask of a sunny day and a few gallons of avgas?

Trouble Spots

Sometimes there simply are too many kids and wait-times balloon. In those instances, we build a “call back” list and give those names to willing pilots who attempt to schedule a private flight when schedules permit.

The weather may be a problem. Marginal weather may keep distant pilots grounded. Low ceilings mean we can’t fly VFR while high winds mean the Light Sport planes run out of rudder. Turbulence can alarm youthful flyers. The air boss — usually the most experienced pilot — makes the best of whatever the heavens give you.

Every now and then a child becomes airsick. Pilots need to be alert for the child who falls silent — usually that means their excitement has turned to



Ayesha had her first airplane ride with the author in November 2018; here we’re at about 2,000 feet over the pine forests of North Carolina. Her family drove sixty miles to the fly-in because she decided flying is her passion and nothing is going to stop her from becoming an airline pilot.

nausea. Carry a large ziplock bag and paper towels.



Check out those smiles! Are they thrilled to have been flying? Or thrilled to be out of Jim Murray's red-and-white Maule? We'll never know. (Note the Mom and the youngest daughter did not fly, only kids between ages 8 and 17 are allowed rides.)

Planes break. We've had all sorts of odd-ball equipment failures, including flat tires and broken brakes. When this happens, it's back to the pairing desk to match kids up with new pilots.

The biggest problem can be the parents. When parents that demand their kids fly with certain other kids it really complicates the pairing process, especially if they wait until the last minute to tell you. When a parent or child insists on riding with someone special, we usually fill the empty seat with ROTC cadets. The kid(s) who could not fly drop to the bottom of the waiting list.

Passing the Baton

Young Eagle events have been among the best days in my flying career. They're all about giving back; about sharing my passion with others. It introduces youngsters to a career path they may not have thought was available to them. Flying was a gift to me; now it's my gift to the next generation. It's a grass roots program; it's a delight.

Somebody much smarter than me once said, "We protect the things we love, and we love the things we know." The general public needs to know about aviation. They won't support noisy airports unless they understand those airports are crucial to their families, their towns and their futures. A Young Eagles fly-in is an easy way to introduce a couple hundred families to the adventure of flight and the importance of aviation. It might help your airport survive in the years ahead. I can't say it more fervently: fire up your Cessna and start a Young Eagles day at your airport.

About the Author



Dr. Mike Jones is a 4,000 hour pilot based in Pinehurst, NC and is eagerly looking forward to flying Young Eagles trips all through the mid-Atlantic states, such as the Triple Tree event in autumn. You always can reach him at PilotMike2012@gmail.com.