

Thousands flock to Aviation Day at Vero Beach airport

By Janet Begley

Saturday, February 12, 2011

VERO BEACH — Aviation enthusiasts hit the tarmac running Saturday morning as Chapter 99 of the Experimental Aircraft Association sponsored its ninth annual Aviation Day at the Vero Beach Municipal Airport.

More than 50 civilian and military aircrafts were open for public inspection during the show. Pilots showcased their airplanes and answered questions from the flight enthusiasts who walked the airport tarmac despite the cold weather.

This year's event featured rides in one of three World War II airbirds operated by the nonprofit organization History Flight, which is currently on an "Until They're Home" Barnstormer tour of regional airports.

Proceeds from the rides fund an important cause — locating America's missing-in-action from World War II. To date, the remains of 200 MIAs from the Pacific Theater in World War II have been recovered through History Flight's efforts.

Representatives Mary Loggings and Betty Bordeaux were busy Saturday answering questions about History Flight and taking reservations for rides that continue through Monday at the airport.

"People are telling me that members of their families used to fly these planes," said Loggings. "It brings back a lot of memories for people and they're happy that the rides benefit a good cause."

Jessie Kennedy, 75, of Vero Beach was one of 22 people who took a ride in the World War II, open cockpit, Stearman biplane operated by a History Flight pilot. Kennedy, a former Cherokee pilot herself, received the flight as a Christmas gift from her husband.

"It was fantastic and exhilarating," said Kennedy as she walked off the tarmac early Saturday morning. "My stomach did some 360's but it came right back up. But I think I saw the ground pretty close a couple of times."

According to assistant airport manager Todd Scher, Aviation Day is one of the most popular family events in Vero Beach.

"We get a little bit bigger and better each year, trying to make things enjoyable for people," said Scher. "We let people come out to parts of the airport that they wouldn't normally be able to, and we try to make it interesting by bringing a lot of neat exhibits."

For the first time this year, the event included an appearance by two FA-18 Navy fighter jets of Attack Squadron 86 from the Marine Corps Air Station in Beaufort, S.C. Also making an appearance was 1930 Consolidated YPT-6A biplane flown by pilot Mark White of Vero Beach.

White said that only 16 of the planes were built and only four are left. His restored plane is the only one that still flies.

"I bought it in Ohio as a project and it has taken seven years to restore it," said White, who added that he and his wife Mary take the plane to fly-ins across the state. He said that people are fascinated when they see the plane. "You just don't get to see a lot of these older aircrafts anymore. It's a piece of aviation history."

IF YOU GO:

When: The 2011 Until They're Home Barnstormer Tour continues its flights at the Vero Beach Municipal Airport on Feb. 13 and 14.

What: A limited number of rides are still available and no flying experience is necessary.

Reservations: call 888-743-3311.

To learn more about History Flight's search missions to the Pacific or to make a donation, visit www.HistoryFlight.com.



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