

# Angels Of Aviation

By John M. Allen

There are lots of folks out there who are doing great things for aviation. We here in Washington get paid to work hard to “enable the adventure and commerce of aviation without the compromise of safety”. Many folks get nice awards for their contributions to aviation. However, there are also thousands of unsung heroes out there who humbly give of their own time and expense to enhance the future of aviation. I was unexpectedly and significantly moved by the work of some of these “Angels of Aviation” when I had the opportunity to visit, with my brother and parents, in their original hometown of Cynthiana, KY.

My parents were born and raised in Cynthiana (pop. @6,000) and I lived there with my family through my elementary school years in the 60s. Cynthiana is a small farming town about 32 miles Northeast of Lexington. While visiting there, I was reacquainted with a cousin of mine, Bobby Craft, who I hadn't seen in over 20 years. While visiting, and searching for a common interest, our conversation turned to flying. I was reminded that Bobby is the part-time, volunteer manager of the local community airport. It is a small airport nestled in a bend of the Licking River, bordered by the railroad tracks and the “poor farm”, with a 3,800' runway and a few hangars. During our conversation, I mentioned Young Eagles and he lit up. The Young Eagles program is a program run by the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), where volunteers take kids up for a ride in an aircraft they rent or own. Over a million kids have received a ride, thanks to the Young Eagles Program. In fact, my sons got their first aircraft (one in a helicopter, the other in a Cessna 172) ride through the Young Eagles Program. In fact, my sons got their first aircraft (one in a helicopter, the other in a Cessna 172) ride through the Young Eagles program when I was the aviation merit badge counselor of their Boy Scout troop.

Just as we began to talk about Young Eagles, Bobby's wife, Jeana, ran to their car and brought back a CD that includes a video showcasing the volunteers and kids they introduce to flying via their Young Eagles events (some of the pictures are included in the PDF versions of this article available on [FAASafety.gov](http://FAASafety.gov)). Bobby runs two events a year (in the Spring and in the Fall). He tells me he gets around 195 kids at each event because he advertises the events in the local paper. What he is doing for these kids in this small community is tremendous. As you know, we in the FAA and others in the aviation community are concerned with the nurturing of aviation interest in future generations. Seeing



Bobby Craft in foreground (with baseball cap)



what Bobby, Jeana, and other volunteers are doing to introduce aviation to these kids in this small community really got to me. You see, it's more than introducing kids to their first flight. Many of these kids have to overcome their fears and feel the pride and self-confidence when they come back after the flight.



I remember when I was a kid in that same community, bored and dreaming of flying. In those days, there wasn't anyone around that would promote activities at the airport. That has now changed. In fact, Bobby has told any kid interested, that if they show up on any Saturday morning and sit on the bench near the ramp, he guarantees that someone would take them up for a flight. When I was getting a tour of the airport from Bobby, who is proud (and should be) with his turning the airport around from one of debt and decay to one that is thriving, I stood there on the small ramp looking over the runway at the adjoining field of soybeans and corn and had a thought. Why aren't these small community general aviation airports used as a center of community interest, much like the community pools, football and baseball fields? Are these small community airports a possible key in galvanizing the interest of small community kids in aviation?



I must also offer kudos to the local EAA chapters (Georgetown and Lexington) who helped the Cynthiana airport dig out from a devastating flood in 1997. Bobby has been fighting an uphill battle to improve this GA airport and has been very successful (I think he has some of the lowest Avgas prices around). He now has plans to move the small FBO building and hangars farther away from the river next to property that was part of the "poor farm". Yes, the "poor farm". The flood could have ruined the airport forever but the EAA helped keep this gem of an airport alive.



Yes, I am extremely proud of what my cousin is doing for aviation and I am proud of other "Angels of Aviation", unsung heroes out there helping future generations get a taste of aviation and get a sense that their futures can soar. Take it from this former kid from Cynthiana.

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