

COMPASSIONATE AVIATORS

Harrison Ford

An eye on the future

Odds are your kid hasn't gone flying with Indiana Jones, the President of the United States or CIA Agent Jack Ryan. That can all change now, thanks to the Experimental Aircraft Association's (EAA) Young Eagles program and its chairman, actor Harrison Ford. Ford has given almost 300 kids their first ride in a general-aviation airplane.

"Young Eagles gives kids a view of the world they've never seen before," Ford said recently in a statement from the EAA. "Each Young Eagle flight is an opportunity to excite kids by sharing a passion for flight and to show them that they, too, can learn the skills to participate in aviation."

Ford's first two-year commitment in 2003 to head the Young Eagles program allowed him to step into shoes once filled by General Chuck Yeager and Hollywood veteran Cliff Robertson. In 2005, Ford agreed to a second term at the helm of the world's most famous youth aviation program, and he has just re-enlisted for another two-year term. The kids are alright.

Young Eagles flights began in 1992, and to date, more than 1.25 million children ages eight to 17 have gotten free plane rides from grassroots airports all over the country. Volunteer pilots fly the kids around a local airport for 15 to 20 minutes. Afterwards, the kids get a certificate signed by Harrison Ford to document their experience. Ford thinks that the Young Eagles experience not only introduces kids to the marvels of flight, but also gives them a life lesson by showing the real-world levels of responsibility that pilots must assume when operating an aircraft, especially with passengers. But do Ford's chairmanship and the EAA program to give kids a single airplane ride really make a difference?

Jamail Larkins was a 13-year-old Augusta, Ga., boy who got his first airplane ride with the Young Eagles. He was so impassioned that he immediately began working to earn enough money for flight lessons. When he got to the place where he was ready to solo, legally at 14, he was still too young to fly an airplane alone in the United States. Like that was going to stop him. Larkins raised enough



money from the general-aviation industry to pay for him and his instructor to go to Canada, where the laws will allow him to solo. Jamail Larkins went on to graduate from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University and, now, serves as an ambassador for the FAA, flying a Cirrus SR-22 to visit and inspire kids around the United States.

So, yes, the program works. For more on Harrison Ford and Young Eagles program, go to youngeagles.org.

Harrison Ford (above), national chairman for the EAA's Young Eagles program, takes kids on a preflight before boarding for takeoff.

Bill Ayres, CEO Alaska Airlines

On time to make a difference

When most of us think of the lifestyles of CEOs for big, big companies, we imagine people with cramp-packed schedules, sleep deprivation, Blackberries and an unending myriad of meetings... Who has time for anything else? Bill Ayres, chairman, president and CEO of Alaska Airlines.

Ayres also finds time to be a pilot, flying his Piper Malibu out of Boeing Field in Seattle, Wash., but admits he does stay rather busy leading the nation's ninth largest airline and its 10,000 employees. Still, he makes the time to fly missions for Angel Flight, the world's premier nonprofit that provides free air transportation in response to health care and other compelling human needs.

"Flying Angel Flight missions is the absolute best use of a general-aviation airplane," Ayres told Flying Adventures. "It's a great feeling to be able to help others."

Angel Flight began in 1983 in a drafty hangar at Santa Monica Airport. Since that time the group has flown thousands of kids and people on thousands of life-altering general-aviation flights. There are now 14 chapters across the western United States, establishing a presence in states as diverse as Wyoming and Hawaii.

Alaska CEO Bill Ayres has personally signed up to donate his time and airplane for 34 missions. What are some of his best memories?

"Taking a five-year old boy and his parents back home to eastern Washington after getting a clean bill of health following a touch diagnosis and multiple surgeries," remembers Ayres. Another poignant memory is flying kids with cancer to summer camp.

Ayres' commitment to Angel Flight comes in more ways than just donating his personal time. Alaska Airlines donates 750 tickers per year to kids and their families who need transportation, often for travel to and from Alaska to the Lower 48. The air carrier also allows customers to donate their frequent-flier miles to Angel Flight, and Alaska Airlines donates cash and services to Angel Flight fundraisers. There's little question that Alaska Airlines makes a difference with Angel Flight, but Ayres is quick to point out how much the charity has given back to him.

"I've been lucky enough to meet the patients who fight their disease with positive outlooks and smiles on their faces," says Ayres. "Their attitudes quickly put mundane business problems into perspective."

For more on Angel Flight, visit angelflight.org. To donate your Alaska Airlines miles, call 800.654.5669.

Alaska Airlines CEO Bill Ayres flies his personal aircraft, a Piper Malibu, for Angel Flight.



Juliette Watt Airplanes for animals

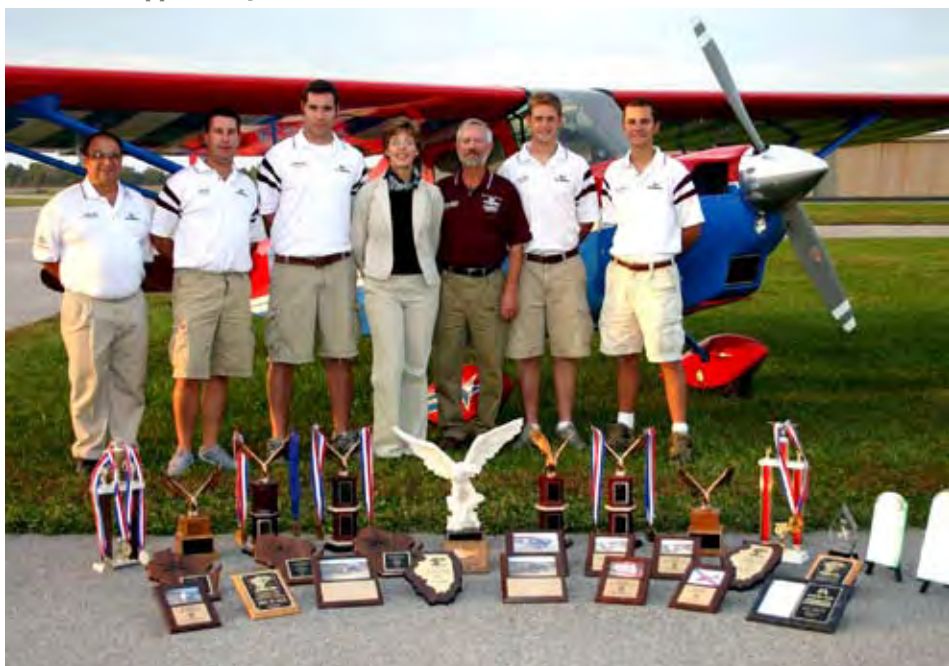
Most flight instructors won't let you horse around, so Juliette Watt had to wait until she got her pilot license. Then she loaded Luna, a miniature horse, into her Mooney and flew it across country, one of countless flights this animal rescuer has donated to the animal kingdom and the work of BestFriends.org.

BestFriends.org is driven by the simple philosophy that kindness to animals helps build a better world for all of us. On any given day, you can find about 1,500 dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, birds and other animals living happily at the organization's headquarters in Southern Utah. Juliette Watt is the power behind the organization's amazing successes, and her airplane is a key to her successes. She has used the Mooney to rescue pets from hurricane-ravaged Louisiana, as well as to deliver hundreds of tough-to-place animals annually to new homes in towns across the country.

Like the 1,600 rabbits she rescued from a rancher in Nevada. Of course, one of the advantages of flying a planeload of rabbits is that you don't have to give a passenger briefing or worry about seat belts. No bathroom stops along the way, just a growing mound of pellets. Weight and balance can be tricky, especially if the bunnies keep hopping around. But for passionate pilot Juliette Watt, it's all in a day's work, and a wonderful opportunity to use her skills and her airplane to make the world a better place. For more, go to bestfriends.org.



Kenny Robinson He saw an opportunity



Above: Ken Robinson and the Super Decathlon
Below: Juliette Watt and colt.

When the International Aerobatics Club developed a collegiate program, there was a team of college pilots at Southern Illinois University who very much wanted to participate. But they didn't have an airplane.

In 2002, Ken Robinson bought them a red, white and blue Super Decathlon. Quietly, he also bought the team their insurance, paid for the hangar... There was no funding available from the college, and it was the only way these kids were going to get to fly. Robinson would go on to fund the program from 2002 through 2007, even with substantial financial sacrifice to his family.

The result? Over the years, the young SUI team has won countless aerobatic competitions around the country, including the EAA's Eagle Collegiate National Championship Award Program in 2004, 2005 and 2006. And starting in 2008, Southern Illinois University will begin to fund their college aerobatics program, leaving Ken Robinson with some extra money now. His plans? Finally, Ken can finally afford to learn to fly.

