

Youth Aviation Adventures

A simple idea of bringing kids to aviation is experiencing exponential growth

Maybe they didn't know what they were getting themselves into. A friend had asked the two pilots, Dan Kiser and Steve Wathen, if they could teach a group of boy scouts about aviation so they could get a merit badge. Sure. It seemed simple enough. Kiser and Wathen enlisted the help of a few other pilots and voila, a handful of kids got a first class introduction to aviation at the Ohio State University Airport. Kiser

volunteered to help them, and notable figureheads in aviation, like former NASA astronaut Mike Mullane, began to endorse the YAA course. The two founders drove a hundred miles to Batavia, Ohio, home of Sporty's Pilot Shop. They were looking to get an endorsement from Hal Shevers, but were surprised when Shevers professed an interest in replicating the program at his airport.



and Wathen repeated their program to several other small groups of kids, typically about 6-12 in a group. Then one day 80 kids showed up. Their latest presentation drew 370 kids and it looks as if they're just getting started.

A typical day for kids attending a Youth Aviation Adventure at the Ohio State University Airport is spent progressing through about ten different learning stations. They look at a cut-away of a jet engine, and then compare it to a piston powerplant. Next they go to the tower and listen to ATC talk to airplanes that are taxiing or arriving into the pattern. Kids move on to stations demonstrating aerodynamics, the role of the airport fire department and the instruments on the panel of a typical general aviation aircraft. There's even 'career' station where kids learn about a variety of aviation vocations, from fighter pilot to flight attendant. For every kid that went through the program, it seemed as if two more popped up to do it the next time.

Kiser and Wathen formed a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to planting aviation seeds in kids aged 12-18. More pilots

"Hal became the first new 'squadron' leader," Kiser remembers. "His latest YAA day a few months ago drew more than 200 kids."

Soon enough a number of new squadrons sprung up presenting the YAA course, now brightened by the addition of formal curricula developed and written by the University of Ohio. YAA 'squadrons' have popped up in Eau Claire, WI, Shawnee, OK, Anchorage, AK, Toledo, OH, Sheboygan, WI.

"The ideal squadron is connected to an aviation museum, an FBO, an EAA chapter, anything that will help to draw kids and give the program a focal point." Successful squadrons also rely on a dozen or so local pilots to help make the program a success.

Kiser and Wathen now spend most of their time assisting other pilots form their own local squadron. "We'll work with anybody who wants to put on a YAA program," Kiser says.

To start a Youth Aviation Adventure in your town, call 614.506.6660 or visit the group's website, YouthAviationAdventure.org.