

Boy Scouts take to the skies



Photos by SAM WOLFE • sam.wolfe@scripps.com

Bill Zorc of Vero Beach, left, a Chapter 99 member of the Experimental Aircraft Association, speaks with Tim Bencivenga, 14, before taking him up for a flight in his home-built RV-8 two-seater airplane at the Vero Beach Municipal Airport on Saturday morning. Eighty-six Boy Scouts from seven troops in Vero Beach, Wabasso and Sebastian were at the airport to take part in the Boy Scout Camporee, which offered free flights and information about lessons on airplanes and flying. After fulfilling several requirements, the boys were able to obtain their aviation merit badge, as well as their space exploration badge.

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VERO BEACH — Philip Nixon, a 12-year-old Vero Beach Boy Scout, described the buildings he saw from 1,500 feet in the skies over Indian River County as looking "like Lagos."

Richie Marini, 11, of Scout Troop 567 of Vero Beach, said the land and sea he saw during his flight "looked like a clay model."

"It didn't look real," said Richie, who was among more than 80 Boy Scouts who took to the skies Saturday as passengers in experimental aircraft and other general aviation planes at Vero Beach Municipal Airport as part of the Indian River District Boy Scout Camporee.

Members of the local chapter of the nationwide Experimental Aircraft Association introduced the Boy Scouts to the thrill of flying in two-seat aircraft as a way of helping them earn Aviation Merit Badges.

Landis Ketter of Vero Beach, a longtime member of Chapter 99 of the

Experimental Aircraft Association, said he wanted the youths to feel the exhilaration he felt as a 14-year-old when he first flew in a small plane in Pennsylvania after World War II.

"It was a cold March day in 1946, and it was a Ryan Sport Trainer with an open cockpit, so my feet got really numb," Ketter said. "But I still felt like I was in heaven."

The scouts needed proof of insurance and permission from their parents to ride in the small aircraft, some of which were home-built with kits by the 40 members of the Experimental Aircraft Association.

But Ketter said the Experimental Aircraft Association has been in existence since 1965 with few problems.

"The most dangerous part of flying is the drive to the airport," Ketter said.

Some of the boys were nervous during their 20- to 30-minute rides, but they soon got over it, said Dennis

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Martin Maruga, right, a member of Chapter 99 of the Experimental Aircraft Association in Vero Beach, watches as Sam Clemons, 12, a member of Boy Scout Troop 599 in Sebastian, practices on a flight simulator at the EAA's office at the Vero Beach Municipal Airport during the Boy Scout Camporee on Saturday morning.

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Faillace, scoutmaster of Troop 599 in Sebastian, who coordinated the event.

Pilot Ken Mishler of Vero Beach, who built an experimental Velocity aircraft in 2003 and is a consultant in aircraft construction, said he was happy to volunteer his time to treat the scouts to a rare experience.

Mishler said his 200-horsepower airplane reached 200 mph Saturday.

"First you can see from the twitch in their eyes that they're a little nervous," Mishler said. "But by the time they land, they're all smiles."

Bill Perry, president of the

"It's as much fun for the pilots as it is for the kids."

Bill Perry, president of the West Palm Beach chapter of the Experimental Aircraft Association

West Palm Beach chapter of the Experimental Aircraft Association, said the national organization has given free flights to more than 1.2 million youths in the past 10 years as a way to inspire their interest in aviation.

"It's as much fun for the pilots as it is for the kids," Perry said.

Chris Powell, 17, an Eagle Scout who attends Sebastian River High School, said earning a merit badge for aviation is more exciting than other awards.

"Some of the merit badges are earned sitting at a desk, writing an essay," Chris said. "This is more hands on."

Ethan Hodges, 11, a scout from Vero Lakes Estates, said he enjoyed a bumpy ride because the pilot banked the aircraft a few times.

"Now I want to sky dive," Ethan said.