

Clouds and wind can't ground Vero airport's Aviation Day



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Nancy Dort, of Vero Beach, jokingly tries to get her son, Everett, 8, to try out the U.S. Coast Guard's rescue sling while Everett's father, Scott, right, and AMT2 Aaron Nachlas, left, a flight mechanic with the Coast Guard Air Station Miami, watch on Saturday during Aviation Day at the Vero Beach Municipal Airport.

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VERO BEACH — Ryan Bartholomew, 11, quickly steered the airplane left and then right and braced himself for a hard landing on water to get away from the "bad guys."

Luckily, the plane floats and the chase was all make-believe, but not Ryan's passion for flying.

"It may be scary but it's kind of cool," he said. "I just like to go up high and low and stuff. This plane is pretty cool because you can land on water."

Ryan and his dad, Blake Bartholomew, were among many in the community who didn't let partly cloudy skies and strong winds Saturday stop them from attending the annual Aviation Day at the Vero Beach Municipal Airport.

More than 30 aircraft from fighter jets to recreational planes and helicopters were displayed at the event, sponsored by Chapter 99

of the Experimental Aircraft Association and the city of Vero Beach.

About 50 aircraft were expected, but did not attend because they could not safely land due to the strong winds, said Michael David, the association's treasurer and past president.

"It's still amazing that you can leave the earth and fly," David said. "We want to promote aviation, mainly to the children. They are where the future pilots come from."

Dr. Jim Ploucha, owner of the plane that drew Ryan's attention, said he purchased it six months ago and uses it to fly up and down the state's coastline.

"It floats like a leaf in the wind," he said.

Behind Ryan, 5-year-old Madison Conboy and her 6-year-old brother, Sean Conboy, pretended to be rescue swimmers in the U.S. Coast Guard.

One at a time, the siblings strapped on a black harness and jumped from the reddish-orange and black helicopter and pretended to rescue people below.

But they didn't go far because the helicopter wasn't off the ground.

"It doesn't hurt at all," Madison said after the demonstration. "It's like a swing on the playground."

The strap can hold up to 600 pounds and crew also uses a basket to rescue people, said Aaron Nachlas, aviation machinery technician 2nd class.

ON THE WEB

Experimental Aircraft Association local chapter: www.eaa99.org

U.S. Air Force: www.af.mil