

Lifelines

Sunday August 5, 2007



The thrill of LEARNING TO FLY



Pilot for a day

The spokeswoman for the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association told me, "If you can drive a car, you can learn to fly!" So there I was, driving to Oakland-Troy Airport for an introductory flight.

"Good morning," said my flight instructor, Wayne Hendrickson, who owns Wayne & Plane Flight Instruction.

He didn't look like your stereotypical TV pilot who wears a leather bomber jacket emblazoned with aviation patches and silver wing pins, but he was sporting a cool pair of shades. As a Gold Seal Instructor recommended by the AOPA, there was no need to look beyond Hendrickson's fashion portfolio. If you try this yourself, however, it's recommended that you give your instructor the once-over, asking for references and aviation experience.



Gina Joseph

"Come on in," Hendrickson said. "We're all set to go. We just have to check the weather."

I heard Hendrickson say something about hazy skies as he studied the local weather reports. I assumed he would cancel the flight. Hazy skies mean lots of clouds and, correct me if I'm wrong, don't clouds carry thunder? Hendrickson reassured me that while a thunderstorm was possible, it was not expected until late afternoon.

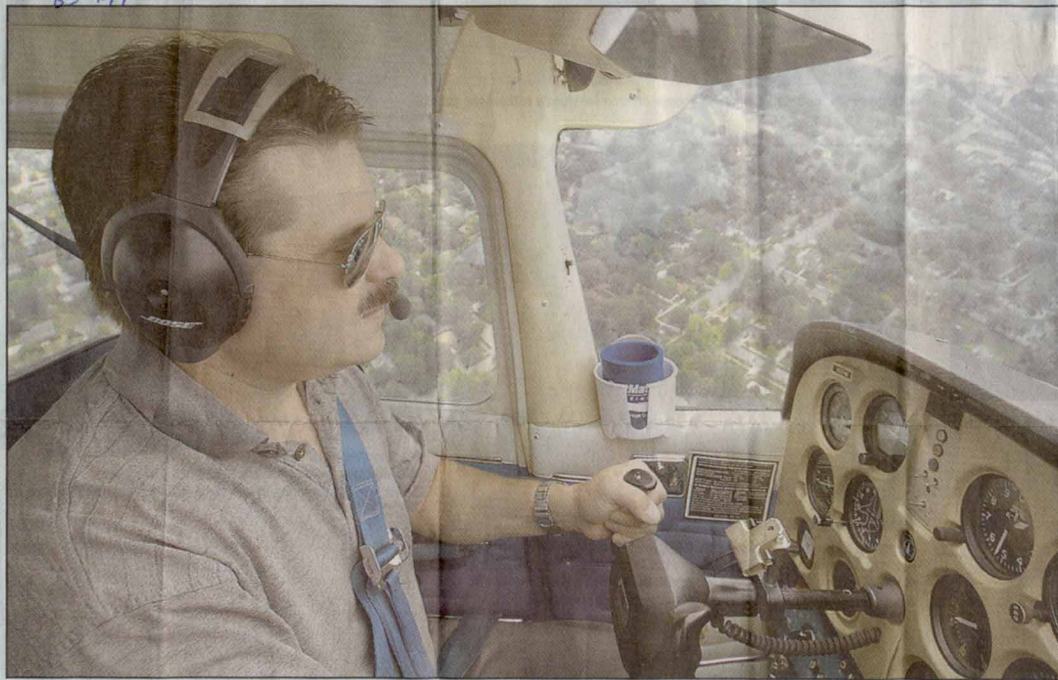
It was 11 a.m. Before our flight, Hendrickson went over my flight experience: I've traveled by air across land and sea, on one occasion I rode shotgun in a Canadian Air Force Tutor, and on another occasion flew with a crop duster. I had to deal with one obnoxious flyer insisting he could sing like Jimmy Buffet on a flight to Hawaii and an emergency landing at Moose Jaw air base, but other than that most of my experiences were enjoyable.

Yet, despite my aviation know-how, Hendrickson felt the need to warn me. Flying on a DC-10 is much different than piloting a Cessna C-172: It's the horizon you're watching, not a movie. On a commercial jet turbulence is rarely felt, but on a small plane the ride can be bumpy and, at times, simulate the thrills and spills of a roller coaster.

"Don't be a hero, because it never gets better, it only gets worse," Hendrickson said. "If you start feeling uneasy, let me know. I can have the plane down in minutes."

I can have the plane down in minutes? Hey, I said to myself. Planes that crash are down in minutes! I held that thought as I slowly climbed into the cockpit.

I sat on the left and Hendrickson sat on the right. I was directed to pull my seat forward until I could reach the pedals on the floor. Then Hendrickson gave me a tour of the plane's interior, explaining in his driver ed voice how the instrument panel's gauges, knobs, throttle and levers work to keep us in the air. Once I knew more about the



Journal Register News Service photo by David Dalton

Pilot Wayne Hendrickson, a Gold Seal Instructor and owner of Wayne & Plane Flight Instruction at Oakland-Troy Airport, in his Cessna Skyhawk C-172.

By Gina Joseph
Journal Register News Service

For anyone who has ever dreamed of flying a plane, there's good news on the horizon. The non-profit Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association has launched a "learn to fly" educational Web site designed to propel Americans' interest in aviation.

"There's been a declining trend in pilot population, as much as 25 percent in the last 25 years," said Kathleen Vasconcelos, spokeswoman for the AOPA. "Project Pilot was started last year as a way to attract people to aviation and show them it's much easier and more affordable to fly

than one might think."

Who can fly?
How much do lessons cost?

Where can you go?
It's the intent of the Web site, www.projectpilot.net, to answer these kinds of questions. Visitors to the site will find a database featuring more than 3,500 flight schools. If you're interested in flying and want to give it a try, many of the schools are offering introductory flights for as low as \$59. These are not simulator classes. Students actually fly a plane under the supervision of a Federal Aviation Administration license certified flight instructor.



"What we'll do first is check the weather and see if it's a good day for flying," said Wayne Hendrickson, flight instructor and owner of Wayne & Plane Flight Instruction at Oakland-Troy Airport, addressing one of his students.

The sky over Troy was hazy and thunderstorms were expected for late afternoon, but until then it was a good day for flying.

"As a student, you'll learn to read the weather," said Hendrickson, while giving the radar screen a second look. As a boy, he remembers wanting to be an astronaut, then a pilot. Instead, he became an

aircraft mechanic. He worked behind the scenes for several years before deciding to devote his time to becoming a full-time flight instructor. He got his private pilot's license in 1988 and by 2002 was helping other people fulfill their dreams of becoming pilots.

"This is it," Hendrickson said, pointing proudly to the single-engine plane owned by Wayne & Plane Flight Instruction. "It's my own one-man show."

The mechanic/flight instructor/pilot knows a good plane when he sees one. A year after getting his license, Hendrickson purchased the Cessna Skyhawk C-172 for \$48,000.

See FLYING, Page 4B

See PILOT, Page 4B



Journal Register News Service photo by David Dalton

Flight instructor Wayne Hendrickson has been a pilot for almost 20 years and has been helping others become pilots since 2002.

FLYING: Online site promotes interest in aviation

Continued from Page 1B

"It's a good model with a good track record," Hendrickson said. Not to mention low time (as in low mileage on a car) and reasonably priced. A new Cessna goes for close to \$100,000.

A reliable plane for training is one factor to consider when choosing a flight school. The pilot's track record also is important. Hendrickson is a Gold Seal Instructor, which is an FAA award given to flight instructors who have maintained a high level of flight training activity (his students get their licenses) and who meet special criteria. Before you sign up for lessons,

Hendrickson recommends asking the instructors about their flight experience. How many hours they have logged? Hendrickson recommends someone with 1,000 hours or more. Ask them why they're teaching? For Hendrickson it's a career.

"He sets a very high standard for his students and holds us to it," said Mike Reimer of Bloomfield Hills, while waiting for Hendrickson to taxi their plane onto the runway. "I've got about 100 hours. This will give

"You get such a nice perspective of the world when you're up there."

— John Mahoney, 66, of Clinton Township

me my private pilot's license."

Reimer is 56 years old and his interest in flying goes back to when he was a teenager growing up in Wisconsin. His father worked for a company whose owner had a plane and enough land for his own private airport. Reimer worked on the grounds when he was 18, and whenever his dad's boss extended him an invitation to fly, up he would go.

"I love the freedom it brings," said Reimer, a retired software specialist who is married and has three children. Once he gets his license, he hopes to fly his family to Wisconsin to visit their relatives. And while it would be nice to own his own plane, for now he's considering a fractional ownership with other pilots.

"You get such a nice perspec-

tive of the world when you're up there," said John Mahoney, 66, of Clinton Township, a former newspaper photographer and chief information officer for Oakland County. A pilot since 1965, Mahoney has had the opportunity to fly a variety of planes — including a few war birds (planes used by the military) — but given his druthers, he would pick a single-seat Rams S-6.

"I fly for the fun of it," Mahoney said. "I just want something to punch holes in the clouds."

For a flight instructor near you, or more information on learning to fly, visit www.projectpilot.net or call Wayne & Plane Flight Instruction, Oakland-Troy, Oakland-Pontiac and Detroit City Airports, (888) 944-3265 or email waynewflic@yahoo.com

PILOT: Getting a taste of what it's like to fly a plane

Continued from Page 1B

plane and how much Hendrickson knew about flying. I felt more at ease, even anxious to take control of the plane, which I did. With the propellers purring, I worked the foot pedals (which steer the plane when it's on the ground), taxied the plane to the end of the runway and did a spin (that was cool) to get the nose ready for takeoff. I thought my driving resembled the antics of a Keystone Kops chase, but Hendrickson said I

did better than most.

Oakland-Troy Airport is a small community airport tucked between houses along Crooks Road, with very little air traffic so there's no need for a lot of control tower chitchat. Just a simple, "We're taking off now" will do. That said, we headed down the runway.

Given the order, I pulled back on the yoke (steering wheel) and within seconds we were in the sky. It was an awesome takeoff and a great ride until I pulled

out my camera and tried to take some aerial shots. It's then that I lost sight of the horizon and started to feel nauseous.

"How fast did you say you could land this plane," I said.

Four minutes later we were on the ground. Afterward I told the spokeswoman for AOPA she was right. Flying is just like driving. The same things that make you carsick are likely to make you airsick. So leave your camera and Harry Potter book on the ground.