



STEVE KROG
COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR

Girls Can Fly Day

Women of all ages explore aviation careers

BY STEVE KROG

IT IS EARLY MARCH as I write this, and March is the month we recognize and honor women in aviation. I paused to reflect a bit on the increasing interest in aviation we have experienced at Cub Air Flight.

Several years ago, a young aviator, Erin Brueggen, came to me and wanted to earn her instructor certificate. We began working together. It wasn't long before the day came for her checkride, which she successfully passed.

Erin immediately began instructing in our Piper J-3 Cubs.

One rainy morning we were sitting at the picnic table sipping coffee and watching it rain. She asked why more women weren't learning to fly. This question led to a discussion of how we might attract more women into the world of flight. The result was deciding — with the input from several other female pilots — to host a Girls Can Fly day at the hangar. From that event, we began receiving inquiries from many women of all ages.

The sheer pleasure of flying an airplane is something that needs to be experienced to be truly understood.

The first year of our Girls Can Fly event, we had about 50 attendees ranging in ages from 8 to 25. Two of the attendees returned the following weekend to go on a discovery flight. The younger of the two women was a high school junior, and the older was a flight attendant for a regional air carrier.

Page Zuccaro, EAA 1298125, the younger of the two, said both of her parents were pilots. Her mother was still flying for the military. Her desire was to give it a try and see if she was also meant to be a pilot.

Well, flying was in her blood. She began flight lessons during the summer between her junior and senior year of high school.

A year later, after earning her private pilot certificate, Page enrolled in a university flight program. Three and a half years later, she graduated and earned her instrument rating, commercial certificate, and multiengine rating. She is currently enrolled in a concentrated flight instructor program and will soon have both her CFI and CFI-I.



The flight attendant, Mandi Neumann, EAA 772426, had worked in the cabin area for several years and thought it would be more fun and challenging flying the “bus” rather than supporting passengers. She began flight lessons and flew regularly, all while working three and four jobs to pay for her training.

Mandi earned her private pilot, instrument rating, commercial pilot, sport pilot instructor, and full certificated flight instructor and instrument instructor with us. After instructing for two seasons, she was hired to fly for an air freight carrier, pursuing her love of aviation.



Two other young women became a part of Cub Air about this time as well. Carley Young, a young mother with two daughters in school, decided to investigate learning to fly as a hobby, but it wasn't long before she too was bitten by the aviation bug. After earning her private pilot certificate, she came to us to work on her instrument, commercial, CFI, and CFI-I. Upon completion, Carley began instructing here. She has become a successful instructor working with student pilots of all ages. She was also instrumental in convincing me to upgrade our Piper Warrior with a glass panel for instrument instruction. The usual comment I get from some of the people she instructs is, “She is tough but fair — and a lot of fun to fly with. And she really ‘wears’ the airplane.”



Victoria “Tori” Essmann also arrived at Cub Air at about the same time. She graduated from high school, wanted to learn to fly, and earned her private pilot certificate before leaving for college. Her plan was to study music, play for a large orchestra, and use flying as a hobby. At the end of the first year of college, she approached me and said flying was more fun. She too was bitten. A career in aviation became her primary goal with music as a hobby. Tori earned her instrument rating while in college by working as a line person on weekends and trading it for flight time. She earned her commercial, CFI, and CFI-I certificates the summer after graduating and instructs here at Cub Air four to five days a week. And yes, she still finds time to play music with different groups throughout the area.



Three years ago, two high school students, Christina Kuchevar, EAA 1468563, and Jaylin Breuer, attended our Girls Can Fly event. We spent a lot of time answering many questions they had.

Two days later, Christina came back for the flight. It was apparent she was aviation bitten within five minutes. She wanted to begin flight lessons immediately, but her schedule was erratic as she played on a traveling softball team and spent most summer weekends playing in tournaments. We were able to work around her schedule, and she earned her private pilot certificate in the fall after returning for her senior year. Thereafter, whenever I had a discovery flight or an EAA Young Eagles flight, I would have Christina fly.



Christina is now finishing her second year of study at an aviation college and will have earned her instrument rating and commercial certificate during that time. She plans on earning her CFI and CFI-I this spring and instructing at Cub Air this summer.

Jaylin also came out for a discovery flight a day or two after Christina. Flight instruction began, but we had to take it a bit slower as she was working full time for the summer. She returned to school for her senior year and then completed her training before heading to an aviation college. Jaylin is also about to complete her second year of college and will have earned her instrument rating and commercial certificate during that time. We are discussing working on her CFI and CFI-I this summer before she returns for her junior year of college.



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Two years ago, Cameron Rucinski attended our Girls Can Fly event. When her junior year of school ended, Cam began flying two or three times per week beginning in the J-3 Cub. A recipient of a Ray Aviation Scholarship, Cam was a dedicated and focused student pilot. She completed her training shortly after going back to school for her senior year, taking her checkride around Thanksgiving. Cam is also an active young pilot, offering EAA Young Eagles flights when needed.



Madi, Tina Druskins, and Cam. Tina, a United Airlines pilot, is a friend and mentor to the twins.

Before leaving for college, Cam and I had some fun flying in the 7EC Champ doing a lot of stalls, spins, commercial maneuvers, and other unusual attitude type of training. She is just completing her freshman year at an aviation college and will have her instrument rating at the end of the semester.

Shortly after Cameron began flight lessons, her twin sister, Madison, decided she too was interested in an aviation career. We began flying in earnest, and on one Sunday morning both Madi and her sister, Cam, were flying solo in J-3 Cubs. Their mother, Jodi, EAA 1573694, was watching, and I mentioned that aviation history was being made. At no other place in the world were twin girls both flying Cubs solo at the same time and day!

Madi earned her private pilot certificate before heading off to college and is about to finish her first year at an aviation college. She didn't get assigned to a flight instructor until near the end of the first semester, so she's about two-thirds of the way toward completing her instrument rating.

Another person attending the Girls Can Fly event with Cameron was enthralled by the possibility of flying airplanes. Allison Simmons completed her discovery flight within days and was soon on the schedule to work toward a private pilot certificate. Between school, work, and other activities, she managed to complete the training and earned her certificate before heading to an aviation college. I traded messages with her recently, and she is doing great. She should easily have her instrument rating by the end of the school year.



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Emerson Swaney had considered learning to fly but decided to pursue a career in architecture instead. Two months later, she and her parents paid me a visit and wanted to know all about learning to fly. She was certain that an architectural career was not meant to be. Emerson hadn't attended one of our events but was friends with Christina and Jaylin. She had made numerous calls to both for advice and ended up beginning flight training about a year ago. Working two and sometimes three jobs to pay for her flight training, she still managed to schedule flights three times a week. Within days of earning her private pilot certificate, Emerson was headed to a Florida flight school. She texted me recently that she was instrument rated and earned her commercial certificate, all in a matter of about four or five months.



Not every person who is interested in flying is focused on an aviation career. Adela Kewley, EAA 1613425, wanted to learn to fly for pleasure and be able to share flights with her pilot grandfather. Adela was working full time throughout the summer but still managed to fly several times a week. She would have earned her private pilot certificate before returning to her sophomore year in college but scheduling an examiner was difficult, so she came home for a weekend to take and pass her checkride. Now she and her grandfather can fly together whenever time and the weather permits.



A career in aviation is not for everyone. But giving young women exposure to it has opened many eyes and minds to a career they never before had been made aware of. I'm extremely proud of every one of these women, and I know they will all go on to be successful, safe, and proficient pilots. *EAA*

Steve Krog, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than five decades and giving tailwheel instruction for nearly as long. In 2006, he launched Cub Air Flight, a flight training school using tailwheel aircraft for all primary training.

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