

S. Tahoe air show to introduce budding pilots to the sky

By Kathryn Reed

Soaring through the air at eye level with the mountains. Lake Tahoe seems so much bigger from the sky, the boats so much smaller. All those trees. The Lake Tahoe Basin really is a forest and not a concrete jungle.

For youths ages 8 to 17 they get to experience this for free on Sunday as part of the annual Young Eagles program. The catch is they must attend Saturday's air show at Lake Tahoe Airport to sign up.

"This is to expose the younger generation to all facets of aviation," explained Michael Golden, who runs Mountain West Aviation at the South Shore airport.



Expect all sorts of planes flying on Aug. 27 and even more on the tarmac at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Photo/LTN file

He is also one of the pilots who donates his time and plane to take kids in the air. Most flights are about 20 minutes – going from the airport, over the casino corridor, to Cave Rock, before turning around and following the shoreline back to the airport.

“Some have never been in a plane before, so it’s really an experience for them,” Golden said.

Many of the planes are single engine, with some pilots having a twin engine.

Sometimes a youngster even gets to take over the controls to get the feel for what it’s like to be a pilot and not just a passenger.

Young Eagles started in 1992 as a way to introduce young people to aviation. Each year it seems more critical because the number of people wanting to become pilots is dwindling. And this comes at a time when the demand is increasing.

In June, *USA Today* reported, “After nearly a four-year drought of job openings, the airline industry is on the brink of what’s predicted to be the biggest surge in pilot hiring in history. Aircraft maker Boeing has forecast a need for 466,650 more commercial pilots by 2029 – an average of 23,300 new pilots a year. Nearly 40 percent of the openings will be to meet the soaring travel market in the Asia-Pacific region, Boeing predicts, but more than 97,000 will be in North America.”

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association reported a high of 827,000 pilots in the United States in 1980, while in 2009 there were 594,285.

Besides the lack of desire to get in the cockpit, the number of flight schools in the U.S. and Canada went from about 2,400 to 1,700 after Sept. 11, 2001. Though, the FAA reports the number of student pilots was dropping before then, with

129,000 in the system in 1990 and 72,000 students in 2009.

Air show

This marks the 22nd year for the Lake in the Sky air show at the South Lake Tahoe airport. Each year it's a little different depending on what planes are available and who is in the sky doing acrobatic maneuvers.

"You are going to see a lot of newer general aviation aircraft and lot of military transport aircraft," Golden said of the Aug. 27 event. "An Air Force C5 Galaxy will be doing an aerial fly-by over the airport. This thing is gigantic."

Part of the opening ceremonies is having the plane fly close to the ground more than once.

Golden said another change is more demonstrations this year.

It costs \$5 per person or \$15 per car to attend the air show.

More information about Young Eagles is online.

The schedule for Saturday's air show is also online.