

Zephyr Cove family escapes injury at Reno Air Races

By Kathryn Reed

A ticket seller recommended the Dauschers not buy box seats for today's Reno Air Races. It may have saved the Zephyr Cove family's lives.

"We were sitting in the stands, maybe a half football field away. It was close ... a little too close for comfort," Ellen Dauscher told *Lake Tahoe News* minutes after returning home tonight with daughter Jillian and husband Andy. "It was the last race of the day. All of a sudden one plane pulled from the pack. It went straight up and then was nose-diving. They also had aerobatics in the day. I thought he was going to pull out."

The pilot of the P-51 Mustang Galloping Ghost died on impact. The death toll from the Sept. 16 crash at the Reno Stead Airport was at three as of 7:30pm, with it expected to climb. Dozens were injured.

The plane landed at the VIP, handicapped area, with shrapnel scattering into the box seats, according to the South Shore witnesses. Had they bought the box seats, it could have been a different outcome for these three.

Jillian Dauscher, 17-year-old senior at Whittell High School, said, "We were leaving and then heard a guy behind us talking. He was closer. It was terrible. He saw arms and legs in different places and didn't see a full attached body."

Dauscher is on her way to obtaining her pilot's license. She was supposed to take her cross-country flight Saturday. That has been postponed. But she called her instructor and will be in the air with him instead. (She flies out of Lake Tahoe

Airport.)

"I know I can do it, but it will be hard to get right back out tomorrow after witnessing this today," the young pilot said.

Her mom grew up in a flying family, having gone to hundreds of air shows without witnessing an accident.

"I'm just so sad for the people who were injured and killed today. All I can think about is we were very lucky," Ellen Dauscher said.

South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Tom Davis left the Reno Air Races minutes before the plane crashed.

He had been there the better part of the day, but wanted to beat traffic so he left.

But he had seen the P-51 Mustang Galloping Ghost in the pit earlier in the day.

When countless ambulances, police and fire trucks went by, he knew it had to be a crash, but looking back didn't see any smoke. While the plane did not catch fire, it left a sea of destruction.

Davis has been going to the show for close to three decades, and was there in 1999 when Gary Levitz's P-51 split apart.

"I saw Levitz's plane disintegrate in front of me," Davis told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Prior to Sept. 16, 16 people had died in the races, which first started in 1964.