

Young Eagles take flight at airport event

By DK McDONALD The Daily News | Posted: Saturday, March 25, 2017 11:58 pm

BULLHEAD CITY — Evan Mynk celebrated his eighth birthday Saturday by becoming a Young Eagle. “It’s the best thing in the world,” he said.

Mynk was one of more than 80 children between the ages of 8 and 17 to participate in Young Eagles Day, a project of Laughlin/Bullhead International Airport and Kingman’s Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 326.

“He’s wanted to become a pilot since he was about 2 years old,” said his mother, Evelyn Mynk. “He’s obsessed with airplanes. The first time we brought him out, he was 6; we didn’t know he had to be 8. So he didn’t get to go — he’s waited a long time for this and he is really excited.”

The EAA Young Eagles program was launched in 1992 to give young people an opportunity for a free flight in a general aviation airplane. The flights are made possible by a partnership between EAA member pilots, the airport and Signature Flight Support FBO, said Jeremy Keating, airport director.

“This is just an awesome program,” Keating said. “The turnout is great, the weather is perfect and everyone here is so excited to introduce these kids to aviation. We love doing this event.” The event also offered visitors the opportunity to explore a Laughlin/Bullhead International Airport fire engine and a CareFlight helicopter.

Since the program was founded, more than 2 million potential aviators have joined and taken a free flight. “It’s a hands-on experience,” said Dave Amspoker, Kingman EAA chapter Young Eagles coordinator. “Sometimes the pilots let the children take the yoke to fly the plane and see what it’s like.”

The goal of the Young Eagles program is to introduce young people to flight and let them see the potential career in aviation, Amspoker said. “Every year there are fewer people becoming pilots,” he said. “The opportunity to take a free flight is also the opportunity to fall in love with flying.”

Program results, he said, have been positive. “A young man I took up several years ago at a Young Eagles event is now a freshman at Northern Arizona University,” Amspoker said. “He’s in ROTC and intends to become an Air Force pilot — all because of a free flight through the Young Eagles program. Many of the pilots who participate in the program have similar stories.”

Zane Gledhill-Rabin, 11, said he has always wanted to be a pilot; Saturday's program was his third Young Eagles flight.

"Since I was a baby I wanted to be a pilot," he said. "Because my family travels a lot, I guess. It's amazing what you can see — from the air, everything is small and it's so cool. Young Eagles gives you a chance to see what it's like. Now I know I want to be a pilot and fly people to their happy place."

Lexi Bossolono, 10, took her first flight on Saturday with her friend Jessi Watters in a Cessna 172 flown by Joe Shelton.

"It was awesome," she said. "The take off felt like nothing. All the colors were really pretty and everything was really small. The best part was flying over the water; you could see the bottom of the river. I think I saw a fish."

Watters, 12, was on her fourth Young Eagles journey.

"This one was really fun," she said. "The pilot did different things and went different places than the last times I went. Flying over the casinos was really neat."

The flights are just as enjoyable for the pilots.

"It's fun," said Shelton, EAA Kingman Chapter member. "It's a little nerve-wracking sometimes, maneuvering through all the chatter and talking with the kids at the same time, but it's worth it. Many of them have never been in any plane and they're expecting it to be frightening. It's great to see when they discover it's not frightening at all."

The program wouldn't be possible without the help of all its volunteers, Keating said.

"Laughlin Chamber VIPs are here to help escort people to the planes, Civil Air Patrol helps with security, our program sponsors, Signature Flight Services, volunteers their facilities and bought all the kids pizza," he said. "Of course the pilots volunteer their time and their planes. Many of my people volunteered to come in and help with the event. We all love aviation and want to get the kids excited about it, too."

Barbara Kistner, a consultant with the Laughlin Chamber of Commerce, said she volunteered for the event as soon as she heard about it.

"I love airports and airplanes," she said. "I think this is such a great opportunity for kids — it gives them a different perspective on life and all the things that go with discovering new opportunities. The kids are beyond excited today and I'm excited for them."