



Summer/Fall

Preserving the Past. Building the Future.

2026 Newsletter

A Message From Sharon

Four Months of Incredible Progress

It is hard to believe how much has happened at Flight Expo since our last newsletter in June. At that time, our new hangar was still taking shape, our programs were preparing for another school year, and we had a very busy summer ahead of us. Four months later, I sometimes have to stop and look around to appreciate just how far we have come.

Our new hangar is now in the final stages of interior construction. Our donated Cessna 172 is together and preparing for high-speed taxi testing and, once everything is ready, its first test flights.

Our 53-foot mobile education trailer has an entirely new look and traveled with us to Oshkosh, where approximately 1,000 young people participated in our sheet-metal workshop and more than 100,000 AirVenture visitors had the opportunity to see the trailer.

But the part I am most proud of is what is happening with our students.

Since June, **Davin, Ashley, Tony and Kevin** have earned their **Private Pilot Certificates**. Several more students have reached the incredible milestone of their first solo flight and continue working toward their certificates.

Our NextGen Aviation programs are also underway, with both our pilot and aviation maintenance pathways now being supported by four area school districts. What started as an idea to give young people a clearer pathway into aviation is becoming a real workforce education program.

We have welcomed a new instructor, Joe, to the Flight Expo team. Work continues on the Tsunami restoration. Our aircraft projects continue moving forward. And through all of this, our volunteers have continued showing up, working, building, teaching, encouraging and believing in what Flight Expo can become.

There is still plenty of work ahead of us. But when I compare where we were in June to where we are today, I am incredibly proud.

Thank you to our students, parents, instructors, volunteers, donors, schools, businesses and community partners who continue to make all of this possible.

One Wing. One Dream. One Student At A Time.

Sharon Sandberg



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Our New Hangar Is Taking Shape

LOOK WHAT FOUR MONTHS CAN DO!

When we shared our last newsletter in June, the walls and roof were being completed and preparations were underway to pour the concrete floor.

What a difference four months can make!

Today, we are in the final stages of completing the inside of our new hangar. The concrete floor is in, the hangar door is operational, insulation and vapor barrier have been installed, electrical work has moved forward, and we continue working on the ceiling and finishing touches.

This additional space has been needed for a long time. It will give us more room for our aircraft, restoration projects, Build A Plane students, NextGen Aviation programs and the many hands-on projects that happen at Flight Expo.

There is still work to do before we can call it finished, and we continue to rely heavily on our volunteers. But each week we are getting closer to opening those doors and putting this new space to work.

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Building Update Continues



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Four New Private Pilots!

Since our May newsletter, **four Flight Expo students have earned their Private Pilot Certificates: Davin, Ashley, Tony and Kevin.**

Each came to Flight Expo with a different background, different goals and a different aviation journey. What they share is the commitment it takes to accomplish something they once set out to do — **become a pilot.**

For some, that dream begins while still in high school. For others, it may finally become possible



Ty's Solo Flight

later in life. Ashley, Tony and Kevin are great examples that there isn't an age when you have to stop chasing the dream of learning to fly.

Along the way, our students work through ground school, flight training, their first solo, cross-country flights, the FAA knowledge exam and finally their checkride. It takes dedication, time and plenty of perseverance.

We have also celebrated several **first solos** over the past few months, with more Flight Expo students continuing toward their Private Pilot Certificates.

Watching someone take an airplane up alone for the first time — whether they are 17, 40 or 50 — never gets old. And neither does seeing them return after their checkride as a newly certificated private pilot.

Congratulations Davin, Ashley, Tony and Kevin!

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Preston's Solo Flight



Ashley's Solo Flight



Ashley a NEW PILOT

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Welcome To The Team, JOE!

Flight Expo is excited to welcome Joe to our flight instruction team and instructor for our NextGen Aviation Private Pilot Ground Course.

His aviation career in July 2022, but his experience as an educator started long before that. Prior to becoming a flight instructor, he spent seven years as a professional educator, teaching fourth grade, fifth grade and high school special education. He also coached hockey.

After deciding to pursue aviation, Joe earned his Private Pilot Certificate, Instrument Rating and Commercial Pilot Certificate through Inflight Pilot Training at Flying Cloud Airport in Eden Prairie. He and his wife later moved to Mesa, Arizona, where he completed his CFI and CFII training at Falcon Field.

That combination of **classroom teaching experience and aviation experience** makes him a great fit for Flight Expo. In addition to providing flight instruction, he will teach our **NextGen Aviation Private Pilot Ground Course**, working with high school students as they learn the fundamentals of flight and prepare for the FAA Private Pilot Knowledge Exam.

For Joe, Teaching and aviation go hand in hand:

“I am excited to pass on my knowledge and passion for aviation. I enjoy the challenges and rewards of teaching people new things. My teaching is grounded in a strong focus on safety to ensure aviation remains a positive experience forever.”

There has been another exciting addition in his life as well. **Joe and his wife recently welcomed a baby boy!** Congratulations to their family on their newest addition.



We are excited to have Joe as part of Flight Expo and look forward to seeing him share his experience and passion for aviation with our students.

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NextGen Takes Off

NEXTGEN AVIATION IS UNDERWAY

This fall marked an important milestone for Flight Expo with the rollout of our two NextGen Aviation education pathways:

NextGen Aviation Pilots

Private Pilot ground training, aviation academics and hands-on flight experiences designed to help high school students prepare for the FAA Private Pilot Knowledge Exam and the next steps toward becoming a pilot.

NextGen Aviation Maintenance

A combination of online academics and hands-on training that introduces students to aircraft maintenance while building a pathway toward FAA Airframe & Powerplant certification and aviation careers.

Four area school districts are already supporting students participating in these programs.

Princeton School District
Elk River School District
St. Francis School District
Monticello School District

That is significant.

Flight Expo has spent years introducing young people to aviation. NextGen takes that mission another step by connecting aviation education directly with **high school credit, workforce development and career pathways.**

NextGen Aviation Program In Full Swing! (By Davin Salonek)

Today, October 7th, the NextGen Aviation program had its second lab of the season! The overall agenda of the NextGen Aviation courses are to spread the knowledgeable aspects of both safety and ground operation services. This program is set to provide its students with their A+P license. Upon completion of the one year program, they will have the college credits and a general portion of the course completed!

For students interested in aviation, becoming a pilot is not the only way to build a career in the industry. The program gives students an opportunity to explore aviation maintenance on another level and to learn skills that are needed to work on aircraft. The program begins with students learning about aircraft starting procedures. The unit covers different methods, including hand propping, hand



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cranking and jet engine starting procedures. They also discuss emergency starts, hung starts, and hot starts.

After learning the proper procedures, students get the opportunity to apply their knowledge.

The class went outside and started the Cessna 172, and even got the chance to navigate the plane on the taxiways. The hands-on approach allows the students to experience what working in aviation maintenance really is like. Upcoming classes will focus on hand tools and measuring devices, giving students more of the practical skills needed in aircraft maintenance.

By combining college credit, technical instruction and hands-on aircraft experience, the NextGen Maintenance program provides students with an early look into the aviation maintenance industry and the path towards becoming a certified A+P mechanic.

With 3 spots remaining, we are looking for more students interested in gaining hands-on experience and taking their first steps in aviation maintenance!



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