



Migrant children
take to the skies,
learn about careers
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Migrant kids learn the sky's the limit



Pilot Andy Strickland goes through a checklist with Alex Salazar, 13, before a flight on Saturday at the Naples Airport. Every month, veteran aviators of the Experimental Aircraft Association give young children ages 8-17 a free introductory flight through the Young Eagles program. PHOTOS BY WANGYUXUAN XU/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Children of workers taught about flying as part of career program

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Special to Naples Daily News USA TODAY
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The 10 children looked fearful. All 10 said, “I’m scared.” Yet as soon as the youngsters landed after their first flight, they were all clamoring to go again.

The children of migrant workers took their first plane ride Saturday with the Young Eagles program at the Naples Airport. It is part of a program by Gargiulo Education Center to show them the many careers and possibilities for their futures.

Gargiulo Education Center director Mary Asta has taken them to the Ritz-Carlton to learn about being a chef, a local country club, senior living facility, a recycling plant and more, all to learn about various jobs. She has plans to take them to learn about careers at the hospital, a horse farm and at an environmental education center.

The children live in migrant housing near Gargiulo Farms off Old 41 Road in North Naples. To qualify for the program they must be the child or grandchild of a migrant worker.

“They don’t have a neighbor that is a pilot,” Asta said. “They (their neighbors) are either in the fields or in the factories. They don’t have anyone to speak to about other occupations. In a regular neighborhood you might have somebody that has a plumbing business, a doctor, a CEO, a nurse, an electrician, but they are not exposed to any of that except for with this program and I am constantly taking them places.”

On Saturday they learned about aviation careers, from pilots and flight attendants to air traffic control, ticket agents and baggage handlers. They also got to handle the controls in the plane while flying at 100 mph.

Before flying Agustin Carapia, 11, said he wanted to be a soccer player when he grows up. After the flight he said, “I want to be a pilot. I want to fly to Mexico.”

Volunteer pilots with the Young Eagles program took the children up one at a time for a 15-minute ride. As the children waited for their turn, their fears escalated.

“It’s scary,” said Ray Martinez, 12. “It will be scary going up.”

“I’m scared,” added Sandy Nava, 10. “When you go up high I’m scared.”

Alex Salazar, 13, was so scared he almost didn’t get in the plane. Asta finally convinced him to give it a try.

After the flight the atmosphere was different.

“It was fun,” said Janeth DeLeon, 11. “No, it was not scary.”

Now Janeth says she wants to be a flight attendant. She said the plane ride was the best trip she has taken so far with the Gargiulo program.

“It was the best because I overcame my fear,” she said.

The difference between before and after the flights was tremendous.

“I was so excited that it transformed them,” said Tina McNeice, a Young Eagles volunteer.

Andy Strickland runs the Young Eagles program in Naples and took several of the children on their first plane ride.

“This is the first step,” Strickland began. “They will also learn about avionics, aerodynamics, and meteorology. We want them to see everything whether it is a ticket agent or an aerial photogra-



Agustin Carapia, 11, is ready for his first flight with Strickland on Saturday. The children live in migrant housing near Gargiulo Farms off Old 41 Road in North Naples. To qualify for the program they must be the child or grandchild of a migrant worker.



Alex Salazar, 13, takes the wheel during his first flight with Andy Strickland on in Naples. Every month, veteran aviators of the Experimental Aircraft Association give young children ages 8-17 a free introductory flight through the Young Eagles program.

pher. We want to open their eyes to the world of aviation.”

Glenn Kowack, another Young Eagles volunteer, showed the youngsters how to use a virtual flight instruction program. The new program is like having a flight instructor next to you as you fly via video.

“This is not an amusement ride,” Kowack told the kids. “This is actually helping you to decide if this is something you want to do someday.”

Kowack told the youngsters that they can be pilots at age 16 and a commercial pilot at 18.

Many of the teenagers were shocked at how quickly they could have a career in aviation.

While all 10 kids said they liked the flight and wanted to go again, not everyone wanted a career in aviation.

Elver Alonso, 16, enjoyed his flight but said it was the trip to the Ritz that steered him to a future.

“I want to be a chef,” he said.

Elver said the Gargiulo program is really helpful.

“It is so we can know what we want to do when we grow up,” fellow flyer Ray Martinez added. “I’m not sure, maybe I will be a pilot.”



Agustin Carapia, 11, left, is ready for his first flight with Strickland, a veteran aviator, on Saturday at the Naples Airport.