

‘Great Start Weekend’ a thrill for new Civil Air Patrol cadets

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Each year, the 152nd North Georgia Composite Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol – a U.S. Air Force Auxiliary – hosts a special weekend for new cadets called the “Great Start Weekend.”

For new cadets, Great Start Weekend is both an introduction and an orientation to the Civil Air Patrol, or CAP.

The highlight of the weekend involves orientation flights, aka O-flights, wherein senior CAP pilots take new cadets up and actually let them fly an airplane.

Of course, the pilot is in the left seat – the pilot’s seat – and is in complete control. And before cadets step aboard an aircraft, they are told in no uncertain terms to do exactly as the pilot says.

Pilots from nearby squadrons flew two CAP Cessna 182 airplanes equipped with the latest avionics into the Blairsville Municipal Airport on Sunday, Jan. 12, to accommodate the new cadets.

Larry Mastin, serving as 447th Senior Squadron Leader out of Dahlonega, was one of the pilots.

Mastin said the CAP cadet program involves a total of six flights that progress toward more complex maneuvers. The program is aimed at piquing a cadet’s interest in aviation to hopefully spark an interest in science, technology, engineering and math subjects in school.

Before each orientation flight, pilots traverse their aircraft with cadets in a preflight walkaround to introduce them to parts of the aircraft and help

them get a feel for how everything works.

Following the pre-flight walkaround, each pilot and two cadets board the aircraft and take off for a nearby airport – nearby in aviation-speak, of course. Once the pilot reaches a safe altitude, the cadet sitting up front takes the “yoke,” or control wheel, and gets to experience flying a plane.

The pilot then lands at another airport and the cadets switch out, with the other cadet getting a turn at flying on the way back.

CAP does not give flying lessons, but a cadet, as a member of CAP, can get licensed in a CAP aircraft for significantly less expense than going through a private flying school.

“What we’re trying to do is introduce them in a quick manner to what CAP is all about,” said local Squadron Cmdr. 1st Lt. Ken Stanger while waiting on the first O-flight to return on Jan. 12.

Stanger said new cadets are introduced to a lot of the emergency services over Great Start Weekend, which consists of search and rescue, splinting, and moving victims. And the cadets helped move the airplane that flipped on its top during the Jan. 11 winter storm at the airport.

“It’s a community service thing. Whatever the airport asks of us, we do our very best to help,” Stanger said, adding that community service is one of the core values of the CAP cadet program.

“We teach them some military customs and courtesies – marching, left face, right face, saluting, yes sir, no sir – things of that nature. Really basic stuff is what the whole weekend is



Local Civil Air Patrol cadets were promoted to the rank of “Airmen” in a Jan. 13 ceremony after completing their CAP Orientation Flight.

Photo by Mark Smith

based on. It gives them a good foundation to start with.

“And as we move through the weeks of our weekly Monday meetings, we build on that,” Stanger said.

The end goal is to get cadets interested in something like the STEM programs at the high school by showing them real-world uses of, say, geometry and algebra, an understanding of which is required to create a flight plan and navigate an aircraft, for example, or craft a search plan.

Maia Wilder, one of the new cadets who participated in an O-flight last month, had the time of her life.

“When we first took off

and I looked down, I was amazed at how tiny everything was,” Wilder said. “It was so cool. It was my first time being higher than 15 feet in the air.”

Wilder’s brother, Alexander, also took an O-flight that day.

“It was my first time. It was an amazing view from the top,” Alexander said, adding that he plans to pursue aviation in the military and personally.

The day after “Great Start Weekend,” on Monday, Jan. 13, the squadron held a

promotion ceremony inside the W.C. Nelson Terminal Building, attended by proud parents and families of the young cadets who, having completed their O-flights, were promoted to the rank of “Airmen.”



CAP Pilot Larry Mastin led Civil Air Patrol cadets through a pre-flight walkaround to familiarize them with the airplane during “Great Start Weekend” in January.

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Waldroup...from Page 1A

Woody Gap School, with its small classes and opportunities for one-on-one coaching, the close-knit community they live in, and the rural setting, contributed a great deal to Waldroup’s academic successes.

Waldroup said he plans to go into a forestry-related field or agriculture at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton.

The student/teacher combo will be honored alongside other high-achieving students in the Feb. 11 Evening with the STARS, an annual event sponsored by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce.



Woody Gap senior Ernest Waldroup scored highest among his peers in a single sitting of the SAT to earn STAR Student status in 2020.

Photo by Mark Smith