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‘Miracle on the Hudson’ co-pilot visits Racine



Jeff Skiles, the copilot on US airways flight 1549 which made an emergency landing in the Hudson River in New York City, is framed by a model of the Wright Flyer, as he meets with people interested in aviation at the EAA Chapter 838 facility, 333 N. Green Bay Road, Friday evening May 13, 2011. The event was sponsored by the Young Aviators, Inc.

RACINE - With a touch of wit, pilot Jeff Skiles spoke Friday in great detail on how he and Capt. Sully Sullenberger safely landed US Airways Flight 1549 in January 2009 on the Hudson River in New York City - easily capturing the interest of about 100 Racine area listeners.

"The water cascaded on top of the windshield. It seemed like it was just going to the bottom of the river," Skiles said of the landing. "But then it popped up and it was rocking back and forth ... I turned to Sully and I said, 'Well, that wasn't so bad.' "

Organized in partnership with the Young Eagles Program, the appearance by the pilot from Oregon, Wis., was the highlight of Friday's event to raise money for Racine's Young Aviators program at EAA Chapter 838, 3333 North Green Bay Road.

"Interest in technology development has been steadily declining in the past years (in the United States)," said Steve Myers, Young Aviators vice chairman. "We're here to stimulate that interest on math, science and engineering in high school boys and girls through aviation."

Since its inception in 2008, the program has steadily grown - graduating three young aviators in its first year, and 12 last year.

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Friday's event was partly to raise money to pay for scholarships and operating expenses and partly to recruit interested would-be aviators.

"When I was younger, I always wanted to make a plane out of those refrigerator boxes and jump off the roof," joked Zach Bowen, 14, of Mount Pleasant. "My dad always said no."

Bowen came to the event with his cousins and aunt, Sue Bowen, 56, of Mount Pleasant.

"I just thought it'd be neat to bring them here, to try the simulator and to hear (Skiles)," she said. "What he did was just fascinating, to just be able to do what he did."

The Jan. 15, 2009, emergency landing by Skiles and Sullenberger has since been termed the "Miracle on the Hudson."

"It wasn't really a miracle," he said, crediting years of experience, training and teamwork. Skiles has logged more than 20,000 hours - or 2.3 years - in the sky. He first flew when he was 16 years old, he said, just about the same age many of the people the Young Aviators program have sought to inspire.

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