

Flying for your community

By Chris Hope, Master CFI

So as spring starts to pop up over the middle of the country (and hints to pop up in the northern areas,) you might be thinking that it is time to start actually doing something about those New Year's resolutions. You know, the one where you said that you were going to fly more this year. Or the one where you said you were going to combine your increased flying (see Resolution 1) with some community volunteering.

Let's think about some ways General Aviation pilots might want to donate their time and skills to the community:

- Through a program such as Pilots N Paws, we could transport cats and dogs across the country;
- Through a program such as Angel Flight or Air Care Alliance, we could transport people with a medical need from their home to the site of their medical treatment;
- Through a program such as EAA Young Eagles or Challenge Air, we could provide sight-seeing flights for kids;
- Through a program such as Flight Hawk, we could support environmental activities ;
- We could donate sight-seeing flights for charitable auctions
- We could provide transportation to a favorite politician who is running for election.

But, and this not going to be a surprise, the FAA has some thoughts on the subject, and most of them can be found in FAR parts 61 and 91. But don't look for "volunteering" or "donations" when

you search the regs. That would be too easy. The regulations concerning just how you can volunteer your services are buried in the context of some other "do's and don't's."

For the purpose of this discussion, I am going to include only those situations where the pilot receives no compensation at all. Here are the some of the regs that come into play:

- Part 61.113, Private Pilot Privileges and Limitations
- Part 61.133 Commercial Pilot Privileges and Limitations
- Part 91.146 Passenger-carrying flights for the benefit of a charitable, nonprofit, or community event.
- Part 91.147 Passenger-carrying flights for compensation or hire
- Part 91.321 Carriage of candidates in elections
- Part 119.1 Certification: Air Carriers and Commercial Operators: Applicability (This comes into play, because it defines those activities that can be accomplished under Part 91, and which need to be accomplished under Part 135 or Part 121

For the first four opportunities listed above, an easy answer: As long as no one is making any payment for the service, any pilot holding a Private License or higher can provide the service. We can haul people or cats and dogs, and we can look at the environment to our hearts content without any comments from the FAA.

Then we get to the “donating flights for charity auctions” item. This seems like such an easy way to give back to the community. A non-profit organization that you support holds a fund-raiser auction, and asks if you might be willing to donate a sight-seeing flight. You think, “Why not?” You love to fly anyway, and this gives you a way to give back to your favorite organization and introduce some people to the wonderful world of aviation.

Part 91.146 spends a lot of time (and ink) on the subject of donating flights for charitable causes. And this is the paragraph that allows us to donate flights to our favorite charity or community organization, subject to a few restrictions (What would an FAR be without exceptions and exclusions?) Here are the main ones:

- Flights must be non-stop and conducted within 25 miles of the point of departure
- Flights must be conducted under VFR, daytime only
- The pilot may accept some reimbursement, but not to exceed his pro rata costs of operation.
- A private pilot must have logged at least 500 hours of flight time. (There are no flight experience restrictions on pilots with a Commercial License, but the pro rata reimbursement restriction applies. Otherwise, the pilot just became a charter pilot and is governed under Part 135.)

- At least seven days prior to the flight, the sponsoring organization must request a Letter of Authorization from the governing Flight Services District Office (FSDO), and the request must include details about the event as well as details about the pilot’s qualifications

So then we get to donating our services for our favorite politicians at election time. This is fairly easy. FAR Part 91.321 addresses carriage of political candidates, but it only covers payment for the carriage of political candidates. No payment, no problem.

The FAA’s requirements aside, there are some practical considerations regarding flying for the public good. And the Air Safety Institute, an affiliate of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, has an excellent 30-minute on-line training video on the subject. “*Public Benefit Flying: Balancing Safety and Compassion*” provides a lot of good information regarding this type of flying. If all of your flights to date have been with friends and family, this short seminar will go a long way in helping you avoid some of the pitfalls that come with volunteer flying.

So make this the year in which you increase your flying, as well as the year in which you donate your flying skills to your community.

Don’t just practice until you get it right. Practice until you don’t get it wrong

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