

## **Better than a \$100 hamburger**

*By Chris Hope, Master CFI*

A few months ago, I suggested some fun ways for new pilots to spread their wings and improve their skills. And one of my strongest suggestions was to “get out there and fly”. But unless you live in a part of the country where there is a great diner at every airport, flying for food begins to pale. So where else can we go that’s fun? Let me give you three suggestions.

My first suggestion is “Pilots N Paws” (PNP) ([www.pilotsnpaws.org](http://www.pilotsnpaws.org)) This organization furnishes a forum for animal rescuers and pilots to meet electronically to move dogs from one spot to another. According to Kathleen Quinn, Executive Director, PNP was formed in 2008 when avid animal rescuer and PNP co-founder Debi Boies asked friends for help transporting a rescue dog she was adopting from Florida and bringing him home to her in South Carolina. One of her friends, pilot and PNP co-founder Jon Wehrenberg offered to fly the dog home to Debi. After the flight, the two brainstormed on how they could begin an organization where pilots and animal rescuers could team up to save lives. They realized that there were dogs needing transportation, and that there were a number of pilots looking for a good excuse to fly.

I wondered why there was a need to move dogs or other animals, and found out that there are all sorts of reasons. In some parts of the country, puppy mills are poorly regulated, resulting in many dogs

that end up in shelters. And some parts of the country are less interested in spaying and neutering than other communities, resulting in an over-abundance of dogs.

And sometimes dogs with physical ailments, making them less adoptable, are in their local shelter, waiting for a home. Organizations such as the Blind Dog Rescue Alliance [www.blinddogrescue.com](http://www.blinddogrescue.com) or [www.PetFinder.com](http://www.PetFinder.com) can help to find an adopter. Such was the case of Junior, a blind border collie in Tazewell TN.

Junior was not attracting any attention at the Claiborne Animal Shelter, when the Blind Dog Rescue Alliance got involved and found a home for Junior in Elizabethtown KY. And thanks to PNP pilot Jim Carney, Junior had a way to get to his new home.

Or sometimes dog and owner have been together for years, but cannot travel together. Such was the situation for Bob Smith (not his real name). Bob was in his 80’s, living alone with his best dog friend Smiley. But when Bob had to give up his home and move in with his son and daughter-in-law he found that his best friend could not ride on the bus with him from New Jersey to Colorado. And he had no money to provide any other transportation. A group of PNP dog-loving pilots put their heads and schedules together and moved Smiley to his new home with his old friend.

No special piloting skills are required to participate in Pilots N Paws. A Private Pilot's certificate is all that is necessary, and there are a lot of pilots who contribute to the forum on the Pilots N Paws website to provide help and encouragement.

A second suggestion is to look at the world of flight through the eyes of a young person, a Young Eagle, in fact ([www.young eagles.org](http://www.young eagles.org)). In 1993, the EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association ) thought it might be fun to get young people excited about flying and highlight the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wright Brothers feat by taking 1,000,000 kids flying. And over that ten year period, they (we, because I participated) did exactly that. By the end of December, 2003, 1,000,000 around the world had flown with EAA members - 1,000,000 kids saw the world as we see it, and many of them got excited about it. But it didn't stop there.

As 2003 became 2004, the EAA leadership started thinking about their next "BIG PLAN". But they already had it! The EAA membership stated loudly and strongly that we loved the Young Eagles program. At the end of next year, the program will be 20 years old. Will we fly with our 2,000,000<sup>th</sup> young passenger? As of today, I have flown with more than 400 Young Eagles, and as a group we have flown with over 1.7 million.

Why do we do this? Why is it so much fun? I think that there is a part of all of us that likes to share our

interests. We enjoy showing and explaining what we do to other people and allowing them to see our enthusiasm. And flying and kids just go together.

You can participate in this program if you are an EAA members ([www.EAA.org](http://www.EAA.org)). There is probably an EAA chapter in your community, but you do not need to join a chapter to be a member. You can be a member-at-large, and still let kids share in your fun.

My third suggestion for sharing your passion for flying, and doing some good at the same time, is to volunteer to fly with Angel Flight. Angel Flight serves "Ordinary People with Extraordinary Needs" – people with a medical and financial need to be somewhere else.

That's a bit of dry explanation, but I will put a face to it. Three years ago I met a young couple with two great healthy kids, and a two-year old that was born very premature. By the time I met Jimmy and his parents, many of Jimmy's physical issues were under control. But his doctors were still working to give him back his sight.

Jimmy and his parents live in Kansas City. His doctor practices in Detroit. Jimmy's doctor is a specialist, dealing with premature infants suffering with multiple complications. Fortunately, Jimmy's parents had health insurance through their employers, and they had employers who let them manage their work schedules around their doctor visits. But they did not have enough money

in the bank for the many flights between Kansas City and Detroit, Ordinary people, extraordinary needs.

Or take my new friend Gus. Gus suffers from pancreatic cancer, a diagnosis that generally includes not much hope. The good news was that Gus found experimental treatment at M.D. Anderson Hospital in Houston TX, a hospital specializing in unusual cancers. The bad news was that Gus lives in Overland Park KS and he needs treatment every two weeks. And he really cannot travel alone. He really needs a companion to go with him. Ordinary people, extraordinary needs.

Often I do not know how the story ends. I do know that Jimmy is now five, and acts like any five-year old. And Gus's cancer is at least stabilized, and the disease that normally claims its victims within months has been held at bay for more than two years. And Gus is now making quarterly trips to Texas instead of every two weeks.

The statement I get after nearly every trip is, "Thank you and Angel Flight for this flight. I do not know how we would get this medical care without you." And that makes my effort worth while.

Pilots who fly Angel Flight missions do not need to possess any particular medical skills. In fact, passengers are screened for medical and financial suitability and told they must be able to get in and out of a plane on their own, and must not need to rely on any medical services during the trip. Pilots are required to have more experience – an instrument rating is desirable but not required. There is an Angel Flight organization serving every part of the country, and the easiest way to find the one that serves your area is to use this locator: <http://www.angelflight.com/locater.asp>

All of these flights will get you into some great flying, will give you an opportunity to connect with local pilots, will provide immeasurable help to others, and will provide you with more than you can give.

Fly safe.

*Chris Hope has taught fledgling and experienced pilots for more than 35 years, mostly in the Kansas City area. Chris holds flight instructor certificates for single engine land and sea airplanes and multi-engine land planes, as well as for instrument training. He holds ground instructor certificates for advanced and instrument training. Chris is an FAA Gold Seal Instructor and a Master Certified Flight Instructor. Chris serves as a member of the FAAS Team in the Kansas City area. His website is [www.ChrisHopeFAAFlightInstructor.com](http://www.ChrisHopeFAAFlightInstructor.com)*