

By Leslie Johnston

Kerwin Day

Ambassador to the Angels

Students who take their flight training from long-time Atlanta area flight instructor Kerwin Day often receive an unexpected bonus from their instructor — a bonus that cannot be measured in dollars and cents. He introduces them to Angel Flight of Georgia.

Although he had no pilots in his immediate family, Kerwin Day grew up admiring Piper Cubs aloft and always wanted to fly. He had to wait, however, until he was in his early twenties and had a job that would allow him to afford the lessons. That happened in 1966, when he was working for Lockheed. Day soloed with Hill Aircraft at Fulton County Airport. In 1977, he earned his instrument rating and went on to become a flight instructor, when he had the opportunity after hours, while still keeping his day job with the Bell System's Center for Technical Education as an instructor and developer in Chicago.

In 1991, after doing several different jobs for the Bell telephone system, he took early retirement from BellSouth in Atlanta to operate a tax business. In 2000, he finally realized his dream. Putting his corporate instructing and training skills to work in something he loved, he became a full-time flight instructor.

As chief flight instructor for Wings and Things and later for Elite Flight Center, Day found himself in an ideal situation to assist Angel Flight of Georgia (AFGA). "I could arrange for a flight using one of the instructors or a student," he says. In fact, he recalls his first AFGA experience vividly. "It was just after September 11. We couldn't fly, of course, so I was at home when I got a call to fly some Red Cross staff members to Washington. It was September 12; AFGA was

about the only one in the sky, other than the military. That was when I really started flying for AFGA in earnest."

Now a freelance flight instructor, Day is on the list of pilots who are available for short-notice AFGA missions when scheduled pilots are unable to make the mission or if a mission arises

unexpectedly. "Most of the time I'm able to do the mission. When I get an AFGA call, if I'm flying with a student that day, I say to the student, why don't we do an AFGA mission and fly to the city where the patient needs to go, and most of the time the student says yes," Day explains. "They are more than happy to do it. In fact, I rarely fly a mission by myself. I'm almost always with a student or another pilot who wants to gain instrument experience."

To ensure that he's always prepared — just in case he's needed — he always has an AFGA logo shirt with him. "That way it's easy enough to get changed on short notice in the men's room and be ready to represent

AFGA," he says. "This dedication has earned him one of the Pilot of the Year Awards," says Bernadette Darnell, AFGA mission coordinator. "Kerwin has become an unofficial AFGA ambassador and recruiter," she adds. According to Day, "That's how I get a lot of people involved. Some of my students, after they finish their training with me (they have to have their



This story is as much about Kerwin Day's students — such as Thornton Muir, right — who fly the Angel Flight mission at their own expense as it is about Day, left.



Kerwin Day, left, poses with his favorite airplane, a Cirrus SR22, and Christian Cherniak, a fellow instructor who has flown Angel Flight missions with Day.

instrument rating to fly AFGA), continue as AFGA volunteers on their own.”

Day flies several missions each month, most of them “happy ones” to transport children who are traveling to receive surgery to correct birth defects or other serious abnormalities. Occasionally, he also transports children who are suffering from an illness or who have been accident victims, as in a recent mission when he transported an 11-year-old boy who had been

in a serious ATV accident. The accident involved several family members who had to be airlifted to different areas for treatment. Knowing the seriousness of the injuries of the boy’s father and sister, it was an emotional, “gut-wrenching” experience, according to Day, who transported the boy to Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Ironically, Day does not own a plane himself. However, this affords him the opportunity to fly a variety of planes. Although he flies Malibus, Barons, Bonanzas (in which he has done many AFGA missions), Cessnas, especially

172s, and Piper Arrows, his favorite is the Cirrus SR22. The airplanes are loaned to him or rented by his students for AFGA missions.

A Virginia native, Day came to Atlanta to attend Georgia Tech. He and his wife Martha have three children and two grandchildren and have been living in Smyrna since 1980. He usually flies out of DeKalb-Peachtree Airport, where most of his students are based, although he

does fly out of some of the metro area’s other airports, such as Fulton County, McCollum and Lawrenceville, as the need arises. He is also a member of the Civil Air Patrol and has participated in a number of search and rescue missions.

“Most of my students think I have the best job in the world,” Day says. Considering the number of student pilots he influences and the many young patients and their families that he helps, they may be right.

For more information about Angel Flight of Georgia, call 770-452-7958 or visit www.angelflight-ga.org.

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