



MyFAA

September 29, 2016

Taste of Aviation

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It looks like a good day to fly.

That's the sign-off on Thelma Rudd's answering machine message. For the past two years, she has shared that enthusiasm for aviation with youngsters as part of a project she started called, "Taste of Aviation — Saturday Flight School."

The idea for Taste of Aviation was spurred by the comment of a friend, Linda Jeffries, who wanted to get her 8-year-old son, Justin interested in aviation. But she found that the opportunities to expose her son to flying were few.

"Most of the aviation-related educational programs are geared to middle school and up," explained Rudd, an ex-controller who now works for the Program Management Organization at the Memphis Center. "I thought it would be good to introduce young kids and the public in general to aviation and aerospace."



Students participate in the Airport 'Sector 6' exercise devised by Bernard Green.

So Saturday Flight School

became one of the missions of Taste of Aviation, which recently completed its latest event for students ages 8 to 11 in Dyersburg, Tenn., about 90 miles north of Memphis. Rudd cast a wide net to pull in contributors and sponsors from a variety of aviation organizations and professions, including the local chapters of the Tuskegee Airmen, National Black Coalition of Federal Aviation Employees, Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals, general aviation pilots, and the local airports.

"A big part of what we talk about is setting a goal and sticking to it," said Rudd. She harkens back to the determination she needed to become a controller. "I was the only black female controller in Memphis for five years," she recalled. Rudd credits the mentoring she received from Marvin Archer, who trained her as a controller at the Memphis Center. "He was hard on me, but he told me that when if I finished, they were going to say, 'You're good.'"

One of Rudd's favorite guests in Dyersburg was Charmaine Freeman, a 90-year-old pilot who didn't earn her pilot's license until age 45. Then, for the next 35 years, she taught others to fly.



*Charmaine
Freeman*

Rudd also draws interesting parallels between Bessie Coleman, the first American woman to earn a pilot's license (in France) and Fred Smith, the founder of FedEx, to expand upon her message. Both essentially grew up fatherless; both endured taunts — Coleman for her gender and race, Smith because of a crippling disease he had a child; and both went on to achieve their goals despite steep obstacles and naysayers.

Another important participant in the event was L. Bernard Green, an airport planner for the FAA's Memphis Airports District Office, and also a licensed pilot.

Green, who joined the FAA in January, had been deeply involved in youth aviation programs in Chicago, where he lived before moving to Memphis. As a member of the Board for Tuskegee Next, Green and other volunteer-members of the organization selected 10 young people from the inner city and worked with them for two months to earn their pilots' certificates — for free.

The participants were drawn from upper classmen in high school to young college students. "They had to interview and show strong interest in aviation and a determination to obtain their pilots' license," explained Green. "Because it was such a rigorous program, it was extremely difficult to pick them," he added.

"It's doable if you're training full time," continued Green, who has amassed about 80 hours flying time himself.

"Most people don't train full time like that." Six students completed the program and earned their licenses. The

value of the flight instruction for each was \$10,000. The students also earned \$1,000 scholarships toward the continuation of their aviation education.

Green's work with Taste of Aviation was quite different, of course, because of the age of the participants.



*Bernard Green with students on the runway at
Dyersburg Airport.*

“I was introduced to Thelma and her program,” recalled Green. “I volunteered to help her and her efforts. I enjoy doing those kinds of activities. There’re a lot of programs in the area, but no one did anything up close and personal with kids about airport planning,” he added.

Green said his goal was to introduce the children to areas of aviation they might not know about, such as airport planning. His presentation was a planning exercise that drew the children into the multi-faceted world of airports.



Thelma Rudd with the kids who participated in the A Taste of Aviation Saturday flight school at Dyersburg A

“At an airport you have several interests,” said Green, including airlines, passengers, and ground transportation vehicles, such as cars and busses. “To get from parking to the terminal, you have limited space, so they had to work together to figure out how to incorporate all these aspects into the space that was available.

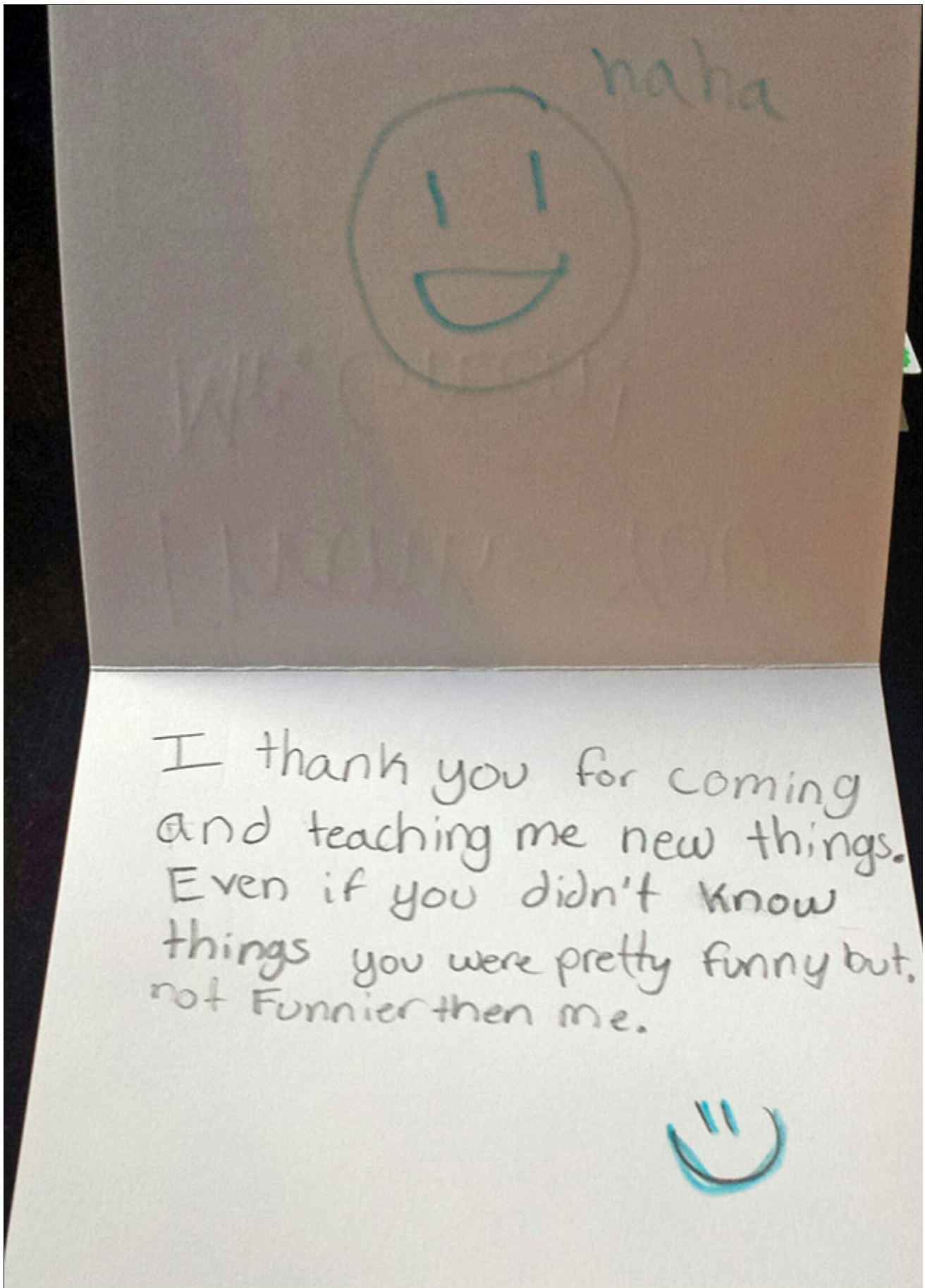
“We gave them a tour of the airport to help them formulate how to do their airport planning exercise,” said Green. The tour included a mock pre-flight check of an airplane. The children also got to see other kinds of aircraft and their uses, such as a crop duster

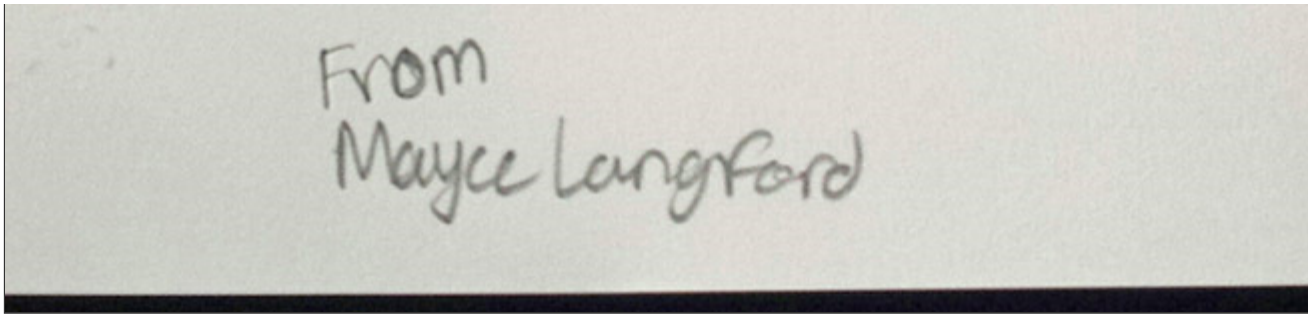
“I don’t know who had more fun, me or the kids,” said Green.

“I was so thankful to connect with Bernard,” said Rudd. “He embodies all of it. He pulls in the airports part of it. He had them on the floor doing projects.” She was especially impressed with how Green emphasized leadership skills. “You don’t do anything in a vacuum,” said Rudd. “You’ve got to talk to each other. He just brought it all together.”

Rudd also expressed thanks to her manager, Tim Allen. “His continuous support is a huge source of the success of this program,” she said.

Neither Green nor Rudd had the opportunity to be exposed to this kind of learning as children, so each feels that Saturday Flight School rectifies that. As Rudd says on her phone message: “It looks like a good day to fly” — whether it’s Green accumulating hours in a Cessna or Piper, Rudd expanding her youth program, or children just plain learning.





A letter of appreciation from one of the students.

Living up to her own message, Rudd continues to set goals. She wants to take the kids to visit the Air National Guard. She's hoping to offer a Saturday Flight School for adults to teach them the basics of aviation. Rudd is concerned that lack of knowledge — or perhaps more often, a fear of flying — might cause parents to steer their children away from aviation.

“I think a lot of adults don't understand air traffic control and how to fly. Sometimes, the parents stop the kids from dreaming.” By getting the parents involved, said Rudd, they might become surrogates for her program and aviation in general.

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David Beck
1 hour ago

This is a great for the kids because even if they do not work in aviation when they grow up they will understand respect the field more. Great job Tast of Avaition lets do this across the nation!



Vanessa
Jamison
1 hour ago

Thank you Thelma....it's always a great day to fly with you! Your continual outreach efforts is recognized and appreciated! Vanessa Blacknall-Jamison!



Carl Carlson
1 hour ago

Great job Thelma! you don't see a lot of opportunities for youth to get this kind of exposure to aviation, your community is reaping a huge benifit from your knowledge and experience.



Lora Thomas
33 minutes ago

Congratulations Thelma, Bernard, and to all the people that make the Taste of Aviation happen. You are providing are wonderful and much needed service for the community. Keep up the good work making it " A Great Day To FLY" for our youth.

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