



SPREADING THEIR

WINGS

The logo is circular with a red outer ring containing the letters "H.A.W.K." in white. Inside the ring, the words "High-Country Aviation Workshop for Kids" are written in a smaller font. The center of the logo features a red eagle with its wings spread, standing on a grey runway strip. Below the eagle, the word "AVIATORS" is written in blue. The entire logo is set against a background of large, stylized blue letters spelling "WINGS". Below the logo, the text "THE HAWK FLEDGLINGS TAKE FLIGHT" is written in white.

THE HAWK FLEDGLINGS
TAKE FLIGHT

BY BETH E. STANTON

THERE IS A MASS MIGRATION IN COLORADO EVERY SATURDAY.

A flock of kids, parents, and mentors descend upon Mack Mesa (10CO), a small country airport located in the high desert northwest of Grand Junction. It's an aviation wonderland. In the air are homebuiltts, ultralights, a Stearman giving rides, a trainer in the pattern, and a hot air balloon.

Fat-tire taildraggers play on a grass runway at the end of a paved strip. On the ground there's a hum of activity as well. RC airplanes zip about, and the whir of rivet guns and buzz of power tools drift from hangars where airplanes in various stages of construction or repair are worked on. Kids are running around everywhere.



This is the home of HAWK Aviators — the High Country Aviation Workshop for Kids — a nonprofit organization that is a brainchild and extension of EAA Chapter 800. HAWK is a collective of dedicated volunteers working together with the goal of exposing youth to multiple facets of aviation: building, repairing, designing, and flying airplanes, balloons, and gliders. The concept behind HAWK is to provide the next step beyond Young Eagles.

"We fly a lot of Young Eagles, and they are enthused, but we didn't have any way for them to get involved with aviation," Kim Neibauer, EAA 1109094, Chapter 800 president, and HAWK vice president, said. "We explain that we have this other program where we can teach them how to build and repair and fly airplanes. That sparks them."

HAWK has brought new energy to the airport and EAA chapter.

"It's great to see young people at the EAA meetings," Eddie Clements, EAA 841022 and HAWK general manager, said. "It's not just an old guys' social club anymore."

BUILD AND THEY WILL COME

Chapter 800 had always wanted to start a youth build project, and the donation of a Fisher Dakota Hawk kit in 2014 was the catalyst. Local kids began building under the tutelage of EAA members providing technical knowledge and A&P skills. Soon afterward, the chapter discovered that according to EAA policy, a chapter could not own an airworthy airplane due to liability. When they realized they were building an airplane they couldn't fly, their solution was to form a nonprofit corporation separate from the EAA chapter. Named for the Dakota Hawk they were building, HAWK Aviators was incorporated in January 2015.

Meanwhile, a second Dakota Hawk that had been crashed was donated to Chapter 800. The owner stripped parts of value and donated the frame. Although damaged, this plane was more complete than the original project. The first Dakota Hawk was shelved and the projects were switched. The chapter donated the second Dakota Hawk to the new nonprofit, and the build was on.

Eddie called vendors soliciting donations to complete the project. A donated Continental O-200 was completely torn down and rebuilt. A new carburetor, magnetos, spark plugs, and interior were donated. Eighteen months later, it was finished in time to fly to EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2016. Don Coleman, EAA Lifetime 37274, chief of antique judging at Oshkosh, is based at Mack Mesa and volunteers with HAWK. He was the Dakota Hawk's test pilot and had the adventure of flying it to Oshkosh that year.



Krista Jankeviciute and her completed tool box.





CHEROKEE TRAINER

When people caught wind of what was going on at Mack Mesa, cogs began turning. West Star Aviation, an FBO in Grand Junction, informed Eddie that a Cherokee 140 had been sitting on the airport for a decade. It had flat tires, a dead battery, glazed glass, and ruined upholstery. Eddie tracked down the owner and got him to donate it. After HAWK acquired the airplane, an A&P was dispatched to get the plane flyable for the 20-mile flight from Grand Junction back to Mack Mesa.

Once the Cherokee was refurbished, HAWK would have a flight trainer. Used tires, new window glass, and upholstery were donated. West Star Aviation recently built a multimillion-dollar paint hangar to paint jets and thought it would be a fun after-hours project to put a great paint job on a small airplane. The Cherokee was flown back to Grand Junction and was stripped down to bare metal, and a spectacular paint job was applied.

"Now we've got a \$15,000 airplane with a \$30,000 paint job on it," John Caldwell, HAWK's financial guru, said.



Eddie instructing Solomon and Braden on a three point tether.

"There's more to aviation than just being a pilot. This organization is exposing them to a lot of different pathways."

– Ladd Klingsmith

SATURDAYS AT THE AIRPORT

Saturdays are build sessions at Mack Mesa. Kids earn one hour of flight time for every three hours assisting with aircraft maintenance or building. Since the kids need to learn metal work, the first project for new members is to build a toolbox. They start by practicing shooting rivets on pieces of scrap aluminum. Next they learn layout, measuring, cutting, how to use a sheet metal shear and sheet metal brake to fold the boxes using aluminum, and aircraft construction techniques per Advisory Circular 43.13.

"If you have any questions, they're always ready to help," 15-year-old Krista Jankeviciute, EAA 1264353, who joined HAWK in August of 2017, said. "They explain everything and don't make you embarrassed if you don't know something."

There is an approximate 3-to-1 ratio of students to adult mentors. Multiple projects take place simultaneously in different hangars, and everyone has a job. The senior kids have become mentors in their own right, and the kids respond well to peers teaching them.

"It's impressive to watch them gain confidence," Eddie said. "There is so much happening that the adult mentors are always busy. The kid mentors are invaluable."

The kids are eager to learn, and their fast-running minds need to keep occupied. Having a fresh task prepared for them when they've completed another helps keep them engaged. The action slows down only at lunchtime when a grill is rolled out for burgers and dogs to feed the crew.

"There's more to aviation than just being a pilot," Ladd Klingsmith, EAA 608579, Mack Mesa airport manager and HAWK supporter, said. "There are engineers, mechanics, certification, accounting, and everything else. This organization is exposing them to a lot of different pathways."

HAWK has about 20 kids on the roster, with more coming each weekend. Currently there are more kids than mentors and space to work, so HAWK has a waiting list and is selecting kids genuinely interested in aviation, concentrating on students old enough to take flight training.

"The elements of flight are so cool," 16-year-old Logan Boe, EAA 1225186, said. "It's out of this world almost how far we've come in aviation."

Logan wants to be an aeronautical engineer and recently soloed in a 172. "Whether you're on the ground or in the air, you learn either way here," he said.

HAWK FLEET

Students can solo a balloon at 14 and earn their private balloon certificate at 16.

"The idea of flying a balloon doesn't seem as farfetched to them as flying an airplane," John said. "It's just amazing how much the kids love the hot air balloon."

HAWK put together a balloon system at zero cost besides sweat equity. When the call went out to the balloon community for equipment, donations included two balloons, five baskets, six tanks, basket covers, instruments, and inflator fans. Eddie has been flying balloons for 30 years and is a designated examiner.

"The balloon gives HAWK's younger kids an opportunity to experience aviation where they can actually control the aircraft including takeoffs and landings," he said. "It has really made a difference in our program for them."

Fifteen-year-old Jake Miller, EAA 1207286, likes working on airplanes, but he really loves the balloon. "I just like being in the moment flying it," he said. "If Eddie would allow it, I'd kind of like to roast marshmallows with the burner. But I'd bet he wouldn't let me."

Along with the Dakota Hawk, Cherokee, and hot air balloon, the HAWK fleet includes a donated Velocity, Zenith 601 and 701, Cessna 172, and Beechcraft Bonanza that are being built or undergoing restoration. Once airworthy, the planes will be used for training or sold for operating capital. Working with the shop mentors on different projects, the kids have built wings, reskinned flaps, hooked up controls, installed a fuel system, and are drilling rivets out of hail-damaged wings and control surfaces. Solomon Brown, EAA 1209886, age 12, is HAWK's rivet removal specialist and mentors other HAWK kids in rivet removal.



NEW PROGRAMS

The Kitty Hawk Challenge is a new HAWK project spearheaded by mentor Tim Allen, EAA 1250931. The kids will design and build their own ultralight, working together on the overall design concept and then breaking into teams for the design and fabrication of one or more systems. A HAWK glider program at nearby Rifle Garfield County Airport's 7,000-foot runway is also in the works. Mentor Russel Franke, EAA 236841, recently purchased two Schweizer 2-22 gliders and two CallAir A-9 towplanes that need some work. Other resources for the program include Eddie's Schweizer 2-33 and glider CFI Samuel Dimentstein's car tow setup.

KIDS GETTING PARENTS INTO AVIATION

Braden and Michelle

Michelle Hobbs, EAA 1211603, brought her 17-year-old son Braden, EAA 1206457, to HAWK after he saw a report on the news about a Chapter 800 Young Eagles event. Immediately, he was put to work tightening bolts and screws and has been back every Saturday since. That was a little more than two years ago, and he is now a private pilot at a personal cost of fuel only, about \$3,500. For Braden, aviation has become his normal.

"The people out there are my little community that is different from everybody else," he said. "They share my views of looking down at the world — in the airplane!"

He loves the freedom that comes with flying.

"You can go anywhere you want," he said.

After Braden was shown SOLIDWORKS software in a class at HAWK run by Jeff Goodrich, EAA 757755, of Radcad Design, he mentored with Jeff to learn the professional version. Braden is now the SOLIDWORKS technician in his high school engineering class, and he's putting his skill to work for HAWK.

An FAA airworthiness directive (AD) on Cherokee control yokes was problematic since replacements are scarce and they are no longer manufactured. Braden has designed and will build a new aluminum yoke, and HAWK is working with the FAA to get it field approved.

Aviation wasn't a blip on Michelle's radar until her son showed an interest. Michelle, a timid flyer, said her life changed forever after being convinced to fly in the Cherokee to Oshkosh in 2016. "It was awesome," she said. "I discovered that I liked flying low and slow and watching the ground underneath. It was so interesting to read the NOTAMs, then apply them in real life to help the pilot. It was an experience I'll never forget. I'm going to be in aviation for the rest of my life."

Since mentors are the lifeblood at HAWK, Michelle wanted to pay it forward to the organization that gave her son so many opportunities. She took the FAA written exam and became a rated ground school instructor to teach HAWK's ground school. She is now Chapter 800's

Young Eagles coordinator and is working on her balloon rating so she can help Eddie instruct the kids in the balloons.

"If you asked me just a few years ago if I would be involved in aviation, it would have been a resounding no," Michelle said. "It's something I've become really passionate about because HAWK gives kids opportunities that they would never be able to get anywhere else."

"HAWK gives kids opportunities that they would never be able to get anywhere else."

-Michelle Hobbs



Braden finishing the wing skin replacement on the Piper Cherokee.

Logan and Shay

Twenty years ago Shay Boe, EAA 1244265, earned her pilot certificate, but aviation got put on hold after starting a family and career. Her son Logan was fascinated with flight from a young age, building RC models and getting distracted by butterflies during baseball games. When Shay learned about HAWK, Logan was thrilled. They showed up at the airport a year and a half ago and have been there almost every weekend since.

A month after arriving, Ladd told Shay about a great little Cessna 172 for sale. Before she knew what had happened, she bought the airplane and was getting recurrent in it, and Logan started taking lessons.

"These guys literally took us under their wing," Shay said. "They gave me the courage to take this on and help me with all the mechanical guidance."

After she was signed off in March 2017, the seed was planted for her to fly to Oshkosh. Overwhelmed with the idea at first, Shay and Logan flew together as a flight of two, alongside HAWK's Cherokee to AirVenture 2017. To share that experience with her son was priceless.



Krista and Colin Morrison removing
hail damaged skins on the 172.



Braden, Sterling, and Jaiden Venn preflighting the HAWK Cherokee at Oshkosh.

"Oshkosh is halfway across America, and he was like, 'Mom, I never realized it was so big!'" she said.

Every Saturday, Shay and Logan look forward to going to the airport.

"It's really good bonding time for the two of us," Shay said. "We share that common interest, and he has a great respect for his mother because she flies."

The two share a friendly rivalry and compete to see who can do the best takeoff.

"It's definitely a trust builder between us," Logan said. "The more we fly together, the closer we get."

FLIGHT INSTRUCTION

Chapter 800 member Sterling Hurst, EAA 138025, is a retired flight instructor of 40 years and HAWK's first CFI.

Recently, a few other instructors have come on board.

"If things keep working out, we'll have kids getting their private licenses before they graduate high school," he said.

Sterling noted that patience is the key to teaching kids to fly.

"My method of instruction is just kind of go along with the flow and instruct only as much as they can take," he said. "We just take it easy so that they have a chance to absorb everything."

He said his favorite part of teaching kids is seeing their eyes light up and the squeals of happiness when they take the controls.

"There's no pressure in this program," Sterling said. "It's not like we're under a time limit or even a budget limit."

HAWK President Bryan Miller, EAA 1136025, took up flying again after retiring from the military in 2011. He's in the flight program at Colorado Mesa University working on his instructor rating with the vocational rehabilitation program and plans on becoming a HAWK flight instructor. His son Jake wants to follow in his father's footsteps.

"One thing I'd definitely like to do when I grow up is do what my dad wants to do and teach other people how to fly balloons and airplanes," Jake said.

VOLUNTEER AND DONATION MODEL

HAWK operates entirely on volunteers and donations. A large group of dedicated

volunteers with deep wells of experience, talent, and connections is the driving force that makes HAWK work. In addition to the five-member HAWK board and Chapter 800, there is a long list of people contributing time and resources in many forms, providing hangar space, lunches, funding for the annual trip to AirVenture, and shop and flight instruction.

"Everybody is about making this happen," Bryan said. "We're all motivated to introduce these kids to aviation and keep them moving forward. Seeing these kids learn and grow is inspiring."

HAWK is a 501(c)(3), and all donations are tax-deductible. Members will take anything: parts, supplies, vehicles, flyable and nonflyable aircraft, and cash. Items are used in-house or sold on Barnstormers.com to keep the kids building and flying. The only expenses are pieces of projects, insurance, hangar rent, and the trip to Oshkosh. The idea is to find old airplanes and incomplete projects around the country and then fix, finish, and sell them. Members estimate that if they can sell one plane a year, it will fund the budget.



GROWING ENTHUSIASM

At AirVenture 2017, the HAWK Cherokee was on display in the Vintage camping area in all its finely painted glory, accompanied by a storyboard describing the HAWK program. A crew of kids was always present at the plane to talk about the restoration. Passersby were astounded that the kids restored and now maintain the plane. There has been growing enthusiasm to replicate similar youth programs around the country. EAA chapters and other groups have contacted HAWK about how to start their own programs. Since China is working to grow general aviation, Chinese aviation executives approached HAWK at Oshkosh about coming to China to help them start a youth program.

Developing HAWK has been a learning process; the group is still new and exploring ways to do things better. Word of mouth, networking, and booths at local air shows and AirVenture are how they drum up support and raise awareness that youth programs can be spectacularly successful. It takes volunteers with different skill sets and knowledge, plus a key person with vision and motivation, to drive a strong youth program.

"It's a simple process in theory, but takes a key individual to keep mentors motivated and kids showing progress," Ladd said. For HAWK, that person is Eddie, a force of nature and a man of astonishing action and energy. Eddie said he thinks every minute is worth the effort.

"I have had a front row seat as to how aviation improves kids' lives," he said.

"I have no doubt that I'll be able to become a pilot because of HAWK. This is the best thing I've ever done in my life."

– Krista Jankeviciute

BEGINNING OF SOMETHING WONDERFUL

Jake said HAWK has been a great way to make new friends.

"My dad used to take me to the EAA meetings, and there'd be bunch of guys talking about their airplanes," he said. "Every once in a while I'd be able to see their airplanes, and sometimes people would offer me a ride. I was the only kid out there. Now there are all sorts of kids running around the airport. I don't have imaginary friends anymore."

HAWK has helped mold Braden into an extraordinary young man with a passion and purpose. He is now applying to the Air Force Academy. His letter of recommendation from mentor and retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Don Coleman shouldn't hurt his case too much either.

Every HAWK kid realizes how lucky he or she is and the extraordinary opportunities the program provides them. When Logan first joined HAWK, he was moved by the support of the mentors.

"Every single one of them wanted to get us into aviation and flying airplanes," he said. "It's really touching to be with these guys. My favorite fellowship is going up with a pilot to fly."

It was two years ago when Krista's uncle took her for her first flight when she decided that there is something great about the sky. "The sky is like a different world," she said. "You get freedom that you don't get anywhere else."

Krista said she thinks she would like to become an airline pilot. "I can't imagine myself flying those huge airplanes, but I think I could do it," she said. "I have no doubt that I'll be able to become a pilot because of HAWK. This is the best thing I've ever done in my life." **EAA**



Left to right: Caden, Michelle, and Braden Hobbs; Sterling Hurst; William McGlouchlin; Jaden Vinn; Logan Boe; Russell Frank; and Eddie Clements.

Beth E. Stanton, EAA 1076326, is a competition aerobatic pilot and president of Northern California Chapter 38 of the International Aerobatic Club. She can be reached at bethstanton@gmail.com.