

The TigerFlight Foundation

Leading the Young to the Dream of Flight

By Sallie Caddell

Parents and educators will likely agree that motivating teenage students is hard work, but it's a job the TigerFlight Foundation of Rome, Georgia is willing to tackle in more ways than one. Located at Richard B. Russell Airport (RMG), the TigerFlight Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, private educational organization designed to increase interest and enthusiasm in science, mathematics and the technologies, particularly among elementary and middle school students and teachers. Components of the Foundation include the Children's Education and Motivational Program, TigerFlight Museum and the TigerFlight Formation Flight Team.

Established six years ago, TigerFlight presently consists of five active pilots, two skilled formation flight coaches, an educational director and two volunteer mechanics.

Fly-ins are the easiest means for promoting the Foundation, especially since the paint on each TigerFlight aircraft is so visually stimulating to children of all ages. Under the artistic direction of Phil "Sunny" Cataldo, TigerFlight's four aircraft are painted orange with black stripes, and the underside is white, further mirroring the belly of a tiger!

"Pilots first thought we were crazy to paint a perfectly nice airplane that color! But, after we painted the first aircraft, no matter where we went, it was a magnet for kids—no matter what age they were! Whenever a child walks by our aircraft, he always pulls on his mother's hand to go look at it!" says Tom Calvanelli, pilot for TigerFlight.



Photography/graphics by taylormultimedia.com

Now that's a successful marketing strategy!

TigerFlight partners with the Etowah Center, one of 13 Georgia Youth Science Technology Centers. The Center supports TigerFlight through curriculum development in the sciences associated with flight and through the planning, organizing and coordinating field trips to RMG. David Wright, regional coordinator for Etowah Center and a TigerFlight member, arranges for elementary and middle school public school students to take field trips to the airport to listen to TigerFlight's motivators.

"Approximately 1,000 to 1,500 students come to the airport each year, and when they show up, the first thing they see are the pilots flying the orange aircraft; we'll even talk to them while they listen on a handheld radio. We usually break up the students into four groups—TigerFlight, Civil Air Patrol, EAA and the FBO—and rotate them. We talk about the history of the C-47 parked in front of our hangar and the aeronautical differences with our smaller Alon aircraft. We put a student inside the TigerFlight aircraft to move the flight controls while we discuss basic aerodynamics of how aircraft fly.

"Later we take students inside a building built to look like a WWII airfield tower, which is located inside the hangar; the bottom floor is a briefing room like you see in the old movies. It's in this room where we speak to the students. Weather permitting, the students eat lunch under the wing of the C-47 aircraft, the Tiger Lady," explains Calvanelli.

First and foremost, TigerFlight's volunteer motivators are positive adult mentors who educate students about the importance of staying in school; equally significant, motivators explain the importance of striving towards goals.

"We show students that there is a good world out there for them to participate in! We tell them about what jobs are available in the aviation industry, from airlines to local airports, but we also know that not everyone will be a pilot or a mechanic. We explain that they need to have goals and to keep training for them!" adds Calvanelli.

To generate interest in aviation among local youths, TigerFlight is uniting with the EAA Young Eagles Program, which is also available at the airport. Beginning in February 2007, on the second Saturday of each month, TigerFlight will fly Young Eagles for 10 to 15 minutes, helping to advance each organization's mission.

TigerFlight's partnership with the Aviation Museum at Marietta, Georgia also benefits both parties. Because the Museum has not broken ground at present and is in the process of amassing a remarkable collection, it needs a large and safe place to store its aircraft.

Having learned that TigerFlight maintains similar goals of building a mini-museum in its hangar and emphasizing hands-on education, Bob Ormsby, president of the Museum, contacted the

Foundation. TigerFlight rents half a hangar—an old WWII navy hangar to be exact—from the Rome Airport Commission. The Commission has graciously agreed to temporarily house aircraft on a case-by-case basis at the Rome airport for the Museum until their facility is completed; TigerFlight has permission to use the stored aircraft for educational purposes. TigerFlight is the official formation flight team of the Museum. At the Museum's official groundbreaking, TigerFlight will conduct the fly-by in their aircraft.

TigerFlight is currently recruiting individuals to join the Foundation to ultimately expand the program. They are searching for enthusiastic individuals who share a passion for helping children. "We want to put our motivational programs on disk, so it's geared to the students' varying age groups. If we have a course available, the volunteers will have an idea what to say to kids about the airplane, for example, and then they can make up their own lesson around that," adds Calvanelli.

The future looks promising for TigerFlight, and its goal for the future is simple: once TigerFlight gets big enough, the current owners will donate their airplanes to the Foundation, ensuring that it will prosper for generations to come.

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Visit www.tigerflightfoundation.org if you would like to learn more about this incredible foundation, volunteer your time or services, or if you would like to contribute a tax free donation.



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