

Taking *flight...*

By KATHY WOLFORD
Staff writer

Imagine... gently slipping through the air while the world passes in miniature below. A patchwork quilt of fields and ponds are bordered by ribbons of black asphalt, and Monopoly-sized houses spread across cozy neighborhoods.

These are the unique pleasures afforded by flight.

Paul Hesse of Empire Aviation has been making his students' dreams of flight come true for 25 years. His love of aviation began in childhood, making model airplanes, and the fascination continues today.

Hesse soloed at 19, earning his private pilot's license, and has been flying ever since, racking up over 11,000 hours of flight time.

His career has been spent in education, first as a science teacher and soccer coach for 23 years at Durham's Northern High School, then as a flight instructor, beginning in 1993 at the Lake Ridge Aero Park Airport, a grass strip close to Falls Lake. What started as teaching friends turned into a full-fledged flight school, which

he moved to the Henderson-Oxford airport eight years ago.

His teaching has led to over 200 people earning their pilot's license. The youngest started flying at 13. Students can solo at 16, but must be at least 17 to become pilots with the private license which requires 40 hours. Paul's students usually have 50 to 60 hours by the time they take their solo flight. Each level of licensing requires written and oral examinations plus a prescribed number of flight hours. The next level, Instrument rated pilot, requires 190 hours and pilots can become instructors at 250 hours. The FAA requires a whopping 1,500 hours for the Airline Transport Pilot license, which all airline pilots must possess.

Accruing flight hours is not as easy as just spending time in the air, Hesse explained. For every hour logged in flight, another one to two hours are spent on the ground in maintenance and other flight related chores. All pilots must also pass a medical exam and a security back-

ground check that takes six weeks to clear applicants of ties to terrorism. As an instructor, Hesse is required to keep detailed records on all his students, which are periodically checked by the

Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

Empire Aviation has three planes, keeping Hesse busy with 15 to 18 students at a time that travel from southern Virginia, Person, Orange and Wake Counties. He flies every day except Sunday, barring bad weather. He is hoping to add an additional instructor at the end of the month.

"They come with curiosity," Hesse said. "It's not for everybody, but if they active-



Paul Hesse is pictured with Bob Walker of Durham at the Henderson-Oxford Airport. (Photo by Kathy Wolford)

ly pursue it, most people can earn their license in about six months."

Bob Walker, who has been licensed for a month, was given a discovery flight at Empire Aviation as a Christmas present. He took introductory flights at four other schools and decided to continue lessons with Hesse.

"There are other schools out there," he said, "but Paul has the unique perspective of knowing how to teach people to fly. That's why I've enjoyed learning with Paul."

On the discovery flight, potential students participate in a pre-flight briefing, where the fundamentals of flight are introduced. They climb into the cockpit for a 30-minute ride and perform basic maneuvers, with the instructor safely beside them, of course. The flight time can be counted toward the required hours for licensing.

For more information, please contact Paul Hesse at Empire Aviation: 919-693-4300, cell: 919-815-1169, or through his website: