

Eighth-grader Levy Lassiter, 13, watches as Young Eagles pilot Mike Brown makes the approach to Smith Reynolds Airport. JOURNAL PHOTOS BY CHRIS ENGLISH

A High-Flying Day

*Middle-schoolers take to the air
in segment of a NASA program*

By Sherry Wilson-Youngquist
JOURNAL REPORTER

For first-time airplane passenger Levy Lassiter, 13, his early-morning flight yesterday was nervous tension turned paradise.

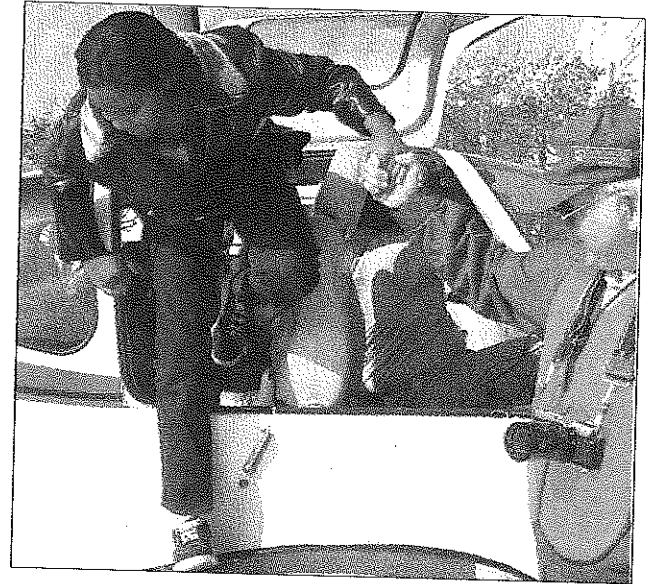
He sat motionless during the rumble down the runway. Then, he felt the thrust and lift. And as the small plane he was riding in circled downtown Winston-Salem, he saw the Wachovia building as he had never seen it before.

"You could see how little everything was," said Lassiter, an eighth-grader at Southeast Middle School. His plane ride was part of NASA's Science, Engineering, Mathematics and Aerospace Academy.

Levy and other middle-school students boarded Cessna 150 and Piper Cherokee planes at Smith Reynolds Airport yesterday for the flying component of the academy's eight-week fall session, which is administered through Winston-Salem State University.

"It's to increase their exposure to math, science, engineering and technology and to help them to become better students," said Earl Martin, who manages the program at WSSU. "We're teaching them learning skills, and we're doing minds-on and hands-on activities. They do learn something about aviation. It gives them an idea of what it takes to fly a plane."

The academy is an educational program that was established by NASA in 1993. Fifteen U.S. cities have programs, including Winston-Salem and Warrenton.



India Johnson, 13, is helped down by Jim Smiley.

The Winston-Salem program is in its first year and is run by WSSU's Office of Pre-College Programs.

Local pilots with the Experimental Aircraft Association volunteered their time, fuel and planes yesterday for the

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