



The American Heroes Air Show

Touching Down and Touching Lives

By Carolyn Thomas

Helicopters are an integral part of our daily lives, but how many of us stop to think about the true value of these aircraft and their pilots and crews?

To recognize and honor these unsung heroes of the sky, helicopter and public safety enthusiast Jim Paules organized a show for helicopters in Los Angeles in 1993, calling the event the American Giants “Celebration of Heroes” Air Show. Paules has since inspired others around the country to develop American Heroes Air Shows in their own states, including Florida, Texas, Washington and Georgia.

Mike Grier, a commercial helicopter pilot and 13-year veteran detective with the Cherokee County Sheriff’s Department, is event director of the Georgia Heroes Air Show. Grier has been passionate about helicopters since childhood. “My love of helicopters started when I was three years old,” Grier recalls. “My father sat me in a UH-1 Huey Helicopter while he was stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky with the 101st Airborne Division.” Since then, Grier has served his country in both the military and in public safety, all the while adding to his pilot ratings.

When Grier and fellow members of the EAA North Georgia Squadron 17 learned about Paules and the California Heroes

Air Show, they recognized an opportunity to indulge their love of aviation and honor service industry pilots and crews. “We decided to adopt Jim Paules’ idea and organize a Georgia show. It’s a great opportunity to give back to the helicopter crew members who risk their lives daily,” Grier explains. At the free event, the public can meet the crews, check out the aircraft, watch exciting aerial demonstrations and, for a small fee, ride in a helicopter.

“Another unique part of this event is the public safety component. Police, fire and rescue teams from around Metro Atlanta bring equipment to display,” Grier says. “There are also military and public safety recruiters, and one of the crowd favorites—members of the Georgia Military Vehicle Preservation Association—present outstanding displays of WWII, Korea and Vietnam-era ground vehicles.”

Based on past attendance, Grier and his event staff expect a great turnout for the 2007 Georgia American Heroes Air Show, scheduled for April 28 and 29. “Our first year, 2005, we had rain, sleet and wind, and our event location flooded,” Grier recalls. “But we were able to land about 20 different helicopters for a crowd of approximately 3,000 people—even in terrible weather!”

The 2006 air show at Canton's Heritage Park drew a crowd that included many veterans. "This kind of show means a lot to our veterans, many of whom drive hours to attend the events and revisit memories with the aircraft," says Grier. "It's an honor for us to recognize veterans and their service to our country in this way."

Grier, a full-time student in addition to his work for the Sheriff's Department, counts on volunteers from the aviation community and beyond to pull the air show together. Some other event team members are Liz Porter, Don Johnson, Pete Acevedo, Scott Christie, Stuart Enloe, Kerry Bedsworth, Duane Roberts and Ed Kobs. All are volunteers and essential to the planning and safety of the event. "We've got a great team assembled," Grier says. "Everybody knows what they need to do."

Grier's team also relies on the city of Canton to make the annual event a success. "Canton is our hometown and is very supportive of the air show," Grier says. For the 2007 show, Canton has offered the use of a field that is large and bare—perfect for the event. "This year's air show will be held at a location east of Heritage Park with on-site parking and an excellent layout for multiple public safety ground team displays, static aircraft and aerial demonstrations," Grier explains.

The American Heroes Air Show is free to the public, but organizers give attendees a chance to support worthy causes. "It's never been about money," Grier adds. "We just want the public to have fun and have a chance to walk up to these men and women and say thank you for their service to the community." ■

For more information on the American Heroes Air Show, visit <http://www.heroes-airshow.com>, or e-mail event director Mike Grier at FLIIFR@aol.com.

