

American Heroes Air Show Gainesville, Florida



Initial Photo Profile

Great Job by Gainesville PD Officer Bryan Smith and the team from Santa Fe Community College who provided this great event site.



HS-11 Dragon Slayers from U.S. Navy Jacksonville



'Heroes' air show thick with copters

By DAVID HACKETT

Special to The Sun

More than 3,000 aviation fans came out to Santa Fe Community College on Saturday for Florida's first American Heroes Air Show.

Strolling under clear blue skies, families and flying buffs alike studied 13 helicopters, checking out equipment, talking to pilots and learning about the different ways helicopters are used. Civil Air Patrol member Glenn Perry, 14, examined a .50-caliber gun with U.S. Coast Guard Gunner Chris Winckel at the American Heroes Air Show.

"We wanted to bring our son so that he can come out and see all the helicopters and emergency vehicles, and learn a little more about them," said Dory Rarey, who came with her husband, Adam, and son Gavin.

That was exactly what event organizer and Gainesville Police Department pilot Bryan Smith hoped for.

"It's a public education," said Smith. "I know firsthand the misconceptions about law enforcement, the ambulances, the military; I like to take every chance I get to let the public know what we're doing for them, what we can do for them."

Spread across the field at SFCC were vehicles for every situation. The Navy sent J.R. Nettleton and Greg Castelucci



DAVID HACKETT/Special to The Sun

Civil Air Patrol member Glenn Perry, 14, examines .50-caliber gun with U.S. Coast Guard Gunner Chris Winckel, left, at the American Heroes Air Show on Saturday at SFCC.

as part of the HS11 Dragon-slayers to talk about search and rescue, anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare.

On the other side of the trees, U.S. Coast Guard Gunner Chris Winckel stood before an Agusta MH-68A Sting Ray helicopter, discussing the counter-narcotics and homeland security operations he is involved in. With a .50-caliber machine gun resting at his feet, Winckel calmly described procedures for apprehending drug runners at sea. An old hand at air shows, Winckel said he has represented the Coast Guard at nearly a dozen events.

"I like the air shows. What I like about it is the kids, honestly," says Winckel. "I'm a firm believer that they need to look at the military, the firefighters, and the policemen as heroes, role models to look up to, not the basketball player that's making \$4 million and getting a DUI later on."

Local law enforcement was well-represented, with choppers from the Alachua, Citrus, Marion and St. Johns sheriff's offices. While these helicopters are equipped and used mainly for law enforcement, they also come equipped with 200-gallon

"Bambi" buckets and recently saw firefighting action locally.

The Florida Division of Forestry had to withdraw its helicopters due to the current wildfires, but the air show still had representatives from Fire and Rescue, Fish and Game, and Shands at the University of Florida. The latter's medical helicopter is a fully loaded "mobile intensive care unit," said paramedic Ed Crews.

Private helicopter operator Ocala Helicopters Inc. was selling 10- to 15-minute rides for \$35 all day. "It was cool," said Gainesville resident Susan Groom, who went for her first helicopter ride Saturday morning. "I could do this all day."

On the other side of the field, a remote-control toy helicopter was twisting and flying upside down as it rode the light gusts, while Citrus County Sheriff's Deputy Carlos Valdes looked on. When asked if he could do that in his full-size edition, Valdes answered with a smile, "yes, but only once."

The American Heroes Air Show, started in California 14 years ago by Jim Paules, has now branched out into five states. This was its first show in Florida, organizers said.

The above article profiled the Heroes event courtesy of the Sunday edition of the Gainesville Sun newspaper. Thanks to David Hackett for spending his afternoon with us.





Ofc. Bryan Smith looks on as the Alachua County OH-58 prepares to depart at the end of the day. Bryan's efforts resulted in 13 aircraft joining us for the debut of the Gainesville FL American Heroes Air Show



Thanks to the support from Silver State Helicopters and the Gainesville Civil Air Patrol