

DON DODGE FUND MAKES A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE FOR AREA TEEN



Pilot Patrick McElligot shown here with a 1999 Cessna 172-R Skyhawk

Nineteen year old Patrick McElligot is a student at Kansas State University Salina Campus. He is working towards a degree in Aeronautical Science majoring as a Professional Pilot with a minor in Aviation Safety. When he is not busy with classes or work, he flies. Patrick's future looks bright. But, without the involvement he had as a younger teenager with the EAA Chapter 1364 Wing Nuts program, his story might be much different.

On Super Bowl Sunday 2009, Patrick experienced something he will never forget. He was 15 years old and a passenger seated in the cockpit of a private plane flying from Junction City Municipal Airport. The returning flight from Ohio to Junction City became somewhat eventful with heavy cloud coverage, strong headwinds, ice on the windshield, and concerns about low fuel. The plane made an emergency landing in Jefferson City, MO. After this flight, Patrick knew he wanted to make a career out of flying.

A teacher told Patrick about Jim Clark and the Experimental Aircraft Association ("EAA") Chapter 1364 Wing Nuts program. It didn't take long for Patrick to become involved with the Wing Nuts. "It was the best thing I had ever discovered," Patrick said. "I could be around airplanes and not have to worry about anything else. Airplanes were my escape when I had nowhere else to turn. My parents were divorced and my mother and I lived with my grandparents. My grandfather was essentially my father. After he passed away, Jim Clark became the closest thing to a father in my life."

Every Saturday Patrick looked forward to spending the day at the Junction City Airport working on or building an airplane. He says, "Growing up, I lacked a stable background as far as family was concerned. The people at EAA Chapter 1364 always made me feel at home. I look to them as family."

Thanks to the Don Dodge Fund for youth and aviation, the Greater Manhattan Community Foundation has supported the Wing Nuts program with grant funding since 2007. Before he passed, Don made a bequest in his will for the establishment of an endowment fund to support youth and aviation programs. Because of his gift to GMCF, Don's memory will live on forever and continue to make a difference in the lives of area youth such as Patrick.

Right: A Wing Nuts member practices welding at one of the Saturday work sessions. Overseeing the project is a volunteer parent who is an experienced welder. Since 2007 GMCF grant funding for the Wing Nuts program has benefitted approximately 60 area youth.

