

# Learning to FLY...

## Keeping her head in the clouds

### ACHS sophomore works toward pilots license one flight at a time

By Lisbeth Wennstrom

Most people would feel a little uneasy when the pilot, who is about to fly them a half a mile into the air, has trouble getting her feet to reach the pedals of the plane and needs the assistance of not one, but three booster cushions. She was also flying a different and bigger plane than she has been used to operating.

The pilot, Veronica Leonard, 16, has taken flying lessons since the beginning of January (it was her Christmas present). Veronica first became interested in flying when her father's friend Captain Jay Rudd, chief pilot of American Airlines at O'Hare Airport, took her out in his plane and let her take the controls.

Veronica admitted that she was a bit nervous when she first met her instructor, but was immediately comfortable with him.

There was a wonderful sense of communication between the instructor and student, which is vital because flying a plane is a pretty high-risk hobby.

Before ever settling into the pilot seat, Veronica must do a mandatory pre-flight check. A "pre-flight" is basically done to make sure that everything is working properly. Veronica once found a dangerous oil leak during a pre-flight inspection of an earlier flight and remains cautious and thorough during this part of her lesson.

Dana Holladay, Veronica's instructor, indicated that parents of younger students usually have some anxiety attached with their son or daughter flying.

"Parents, especially moms, are usually anxious about safety and tend to ask a lot of questions regarding the training," said Holladay.

Veronica explained that her mom was not thrilled with her flying and even though her dad was excited about her flying lessons, he did not want to be informed when she would begin flying solo.

"My dad does not even want to think about me flying solo," said Veronica.

Kristin Leonard, the mother of Veronica, shared her fears of her daughter flying.

"Well, I have some apprehensions, but [Veronica] is very excited...I'm trying to embrace it."

Students, flight instructor Holladay commented, are a little more comfortable with the situation than their parents.

Holladay has never had a student panic while in the pilot seat.

Air-sickness is about the only thing that brings

a first-time student some uneasiness and eventually the student builds up a tolerance to upset stomachs.

According to Holladay, it is completely natural for a person to become a little woozy after the second or third landing and take-off. Veronica however, was composed, which is an obvious sign of her experience.

First lessons in the plane usually involve routine pre-flight checks and a couple of shallow climbs. Even though students must have some ground schooling before their first flight, instructors like to send them up as soon as possible to avoid confusions with terms and scenarios.

Veronica, however, is well beyond that stage and within a couple weeks should be flying solo even though she will not be able to obtain a license until she turns 17.

Veronica stated that landing is usually the most difficult aspect of flying.

"Landing in a cross wind is tricky because you do different steering maneuvers than a regular landing would call for," Leonard explained.

This is not your typical after-school activity for an Antioch Community High School sophomore.

Holladay indicated that many of his students are in their mid-twenties. Younger students usually do not have \$7000 to \$10000 to invest in flying lessons, let alone at least 40 hours of time that is required in the air.

Veronica appears to be a natural as she informs Westosha Traffic that Cessna 832 will be returning to base for Runway 21. She termed this action "calling in."

"Veronica is learning faster than most; she has good motor skills," observed Holladay.

Holladay commented that he has only taught about a half a dozen minors how to fly, but has no problem teaching younger students. The most negative trait of any student is any trait that correlates with reckless behavior, which any student of any age group can possess.

Poor-decision making is another characteristic that every pilot needs to avoid. Holladay spoke of a devastating incident in which an intoxicated adult of a local airport made the poor decision to fly and crashed the plane.

Veronica shows a passion for aviation and has an almost magical appreciation for the world of flight.

"When it is a crappy day outside and it's cloudy, it is amazing to go up over the clouds; it is a completely different world, everything else doesn't exist."

## ✈ Steps to earning a pilots license:

- You must be 16 years old to solo, and be 17 years old to receive your license.
- Pass a basic medical examination.
- Receive the required amount of instruction from a Certified Flight Instructor (CFI).
- 40 hours of flight time, 20 of which must be dual (flying with an instructor).
- Pass a written examination (100 multiple-choice questions).
- Pass a "checkride" (aircraft equivalent of a driving test) given by an FAA-approved examiner.



✈ Veronica, 16, checks the front tire during her preflight check to see if there is enough room for any landing shock to occur. This is one of the many things she needs to check on the plane before every flight.



✈ Checking the fuel gages and low vacuum light to make sure everything is in order, and climbing on top of the plane to check the fuel visually, are just a few of the checks Veronica has to make before every flight.



✈ After take off, Veronica flies a straight and level course as her instructor gives her a run through on the skills they will practice during the lesson. Her flights often include practices in engine failure procedures and stalling.



✈ Although Veronica flies out of Westosha airport, she sometimes gets the opportunity to view Antioch from above. During this lesson she flew right over Antioch Community High School.