

MASTER PILOT AWARD



Submitted Photo

In a special ceremony at the recent Midwest LSA Expo, McLeansboro resident Leland Widick, CENTER, was presented the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award. Mr. Widick currently operates Safe Aviation Educators based at Mount Vernon Outland Airport. Pictured, FROM LEFT, are Springfield Flight Standards District Office Manager Stan Swank, Widick and Springfield Flight Standards District Office Safety Programs Manager Warren Smith.

Local aviation educator achieves FAA's highest honor

Leland Widick has inspired many over his 60 plus year aviation career

BY JOSH JONES
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MOUNT VERNON — In a special ceremony at the recent Midwest LSA Expo, McLeansboro resident Leland Widick was presented the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award.

According to a press release from Mount Vernon Outland Airport, the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award is issued to pilots who

have safely flown over 50 years from the date of their first solo. It is the highest civilian aviation achievement. Widick said it was an honor to receive the award.

"I have to admit I did not realize the enormity of that award and I was deeply gratified and humbled that I was offered that award," Widick said.

FAA Springfield Flight Standards Office Manager Stan Swank and Safety Programs Manager Warren Smith were on hand to present the award. Along with the award, the pair presented Widick a master compilation containing copies of all official FAA records in Widick's official file in Oklahoma City.

In a room packed full of pilots, Smith pulled various items from Widick's file including test scores and even a crude drawing created by Widick in the 1960s providing authorities directions to his home. Smith mentioned that Widick was one of the longest serving FAA Designated Pilot Examiners in the region. Several in the room, including Smith, raised their hands indicating they had survived a Leland Widick "Check Ride."

Widick lightheartedly noted that the presentation reminded him of the television series "This Is Your Life."

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"It was just so humbling and with 63 years of aviation you really don't think of it as a single entity until it was compiled like that," Widick said. "I was speechless and that is something to say for a flight instructor, a few words is not in a flight instructor's vocabulary, you say lots of words over and over and over."

Widick said that his experience with the FAA has been very positive.

"I worked with a lot of those fellows, who have not only been colleagues and supervisors, but they have been good friends, consummate aviators," Widick said. "Some people don't have the opportunities to serve with people like the Springfield Flight Standards District Office."

Mount Vernon Outland Airport Director Chris Collins said that Widick has been a great inspiration to him and many others. He said an example of Widick's dedication to education is the investment he made to bring a Redbird SD Flight Simulator for training to the Koziara Terminal at Mount Vernon Outland Airport.

"This is a well-deserved honor for a true aviator. Leland has been an inspiration and a mentor to me throughout my career at the airport," Collins said. "What most people don't realize, people his age are slowing down, winding down, but not Leland. He is always trying to help future generations."

Widick currently operates Safe Aviation Educators based at Mount Vernon Outland Airport. A lifelong educator, Widick began his career teaching Music Education at McLeansboro High School. In addition to nearly 30 years as an FAA Designated Pilot Examiner, Widick spent over 20 years as the Chief Flight Instructor at SIU Carbondale. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, have been influenced by Widick over those 50 plus years. He offered some advice to those interested in pursuing a career in aviation.

"There couldn't be any better time for a career in aviation. I have a presentation that is designed for junior high kids through high school and their parents and it goes over what is out there in aviation," Widick said. "Not just piloting but the technicians, food service, everything associated with aviation and what they need to study in their schools to move toward that."

Widick said the program is called "Let's Wing It" which he adopted and refined from a colleague.

"I am available at any school that wants to contact me," Widick said. "I would be glad to go over to churches, any time someone needs a speaker for about 20 to 30 minutes I can present that and I would be more than happy to continue to do that."

Those interested in having Widick present or to train in the flight simulator at Mount Vernon Outland Airport, may contact him at lwidick1@frontier.com or by phone at (618) 559-0025.

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