

*From the Lakeshore Times-Advance, by Scott Nixon, May 29, 2024*

## Partners in Learning group learns about aviation at Sexsmith Airport



Summer, left, and Tyler Papple of Papple Aviation spoke at Sexsmith Airport north of Exeter on May 13.

EXETER Aviation was the theme at a recent Partners in Learning event north of Exeter.

Partners in Learning, a Grand Bend-based group formed in 2005 to provide learning opportunities for seniors, visited the Sexsmith Airport on MacDonald Road in Bluewater on May 13 to learn about the airstrip and some of the pilots who use it.

Exeter's Tom Hartai, an aviator and shareholder at Sexsmith, said the airport, which has two runways, has been in existence for more than 50 years.

"We're very fortunate to have this," he said.

The airport hosts two events in the summer for the general public: a family fly-in/drive-in breakfast held on the last Sunday of May, as well as a corn roast on the last Sunday of August.

Hartai said the airport promotes aviation in the community and, in the past, has hosted a Discover Aviation event, which offered free 15-

minute airplane rides for those aged eight to 18.

"The whole idea of it is to get kids into aviation," he said, estimating that two per cent of the children who are taken up for flights get into the field.

The airport and its pilots also make donations to local organizations, and Hartai said the annual Fly the Dream Scholarship involves a partnership between COPA Flight 177 and the Jeremy Mason Memorial Trust Fund to award a \$3,000 scholarship to a young pilot working toward their private pilot licence.

Hartai, who recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of having his pilot licence, said his biggest joy is being able to share aviation with others and take people up for flights. One special moment occurred in 2023 when he took part in a "valour flight" over the Goderich Remembrance Day ceremonies. That flight saw Hartai, who served in the military, and other pilots take five

senior veterans over the observances in a missing man formation to honour lost or missing servicemen.

Seaforth-based Papple Aviation also took part in the valour flight, and its owners, Tyler and Summer, spoke at the May13 event.

Papple Aviation provides scenic flights and air taxi services out of six airports. Summer Papple, whose first flight was in 2015 with Hartai, said scenic and taxi flights now represent most of what the business does, including flights into Toronto Island and Manitoulin Island. They've done parcel delivery flights in the north and have been hired by local conservation authorities to do shoreline flights to look for things such as erosion.

One fun part of the business, Summer Papple said, has been the gender reveal flights they've been hired for.

Aircraft maintenance engineer Norm Paterson of the Mitchell area spoke of his work maintaining planes in an area stretching from Owen Sound to Sarnia. His work includes annual inspection and maintenance.

"A lot of the planes I work on are quite old," he said, with the oldest built in the 1940s.

Paterson said the most common problems with airplanes are in the engines and exhaust systems, the latter which can crack or corrode. He said his job requires him to be aware of the latest aviation technology.

"It's always interesting and always challenging," he said.

Michelle LaPointe of Kincardine spoke of the

Van's Aircraft amateur-built plane that she and her husband Pat completed after buying it partially built in London in August 2019.

"It was stored in piles, sitting in somebody's garage," LaPointe said.

She detailed the hard work that went into completing the plane and showed pictures of their progress.

"It felt like we were constantly putting things together and taking them apart," she admitted.

After about four years, their plane had its final inspection in August 2023 and Paterson took the plane up for its first flight two months later.

LaPointe said there are 4,500 amateur-built planes in Canada.

Grand Bend's Gary Wilson, who has been involved in aviation for 30 years, spoke of his time as a flight instructor.

"It's a lot of fun," he said of teaching people how to fly, "and it's very pleasurable for me to see people get that licence and achieve that goal."

Wilson said the minimum age to achieve a private pilot licence is 17, and about 20 to 25 per cent of the students he sees are female. He said he tailors his training to each individual, and spoke of the importance of decision making while in the cockpit.

It takes a minimum of 45 hours to achieve a pilot licence, with the average being about 90 hours. Wilson said Transport Canada has been continually raising standards to pass the flight test.

Formore information about Partners in Learning visit [partnesinlearning.ca/](http://partnesinlearning.ca/).