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Young pilot has role in maiden cross-country flight - Flight across the US: group attempting radio controlled airplane first

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MILFORD — Mike Maluk, 15, of Milford is pilot number 27.

Maluk and a nationwide group of model airplane enthusiasts will soon attempt to fly a battery powered Radio Controlled (RC) airplane designated as a "parkflyer" in all 48 contiguous United States.

A parkflyer is a small RC plane typically flown in a field such as a local park or soccer field. The name they have given this adventure is Wings Across America 2008, or "WAA-08" for short.

This type of project has been attempted before. What sets this project apart from all the others ever attempted or completed is that the pilots will hand deliver the plane from pilot to pilot. The plane will never be shipped by mail to its next destination. This method will be creating a "chain" of pilots that personally fly, then hand off the model to the next pilot, all across the continental United States.

In the end, the model airplane will have flown in all 48 contiguous states and cover a distance of over 14,000 miles along the way. It will end its journey at home field about 12 months after it makes its maiden flight in eastern Virginia. Currently, over 250 pilots have registered to take part in this history-making project.

WAA-08 is the brainchild of Frank Geisler of Gloucester, Va., who is an avid RC pilot who also enjoys discussing flying with people all over the USA using the RC Forums on the World Wide Web. All that was needed were hundreds of RC pilots across the US in every state willing to fly the plane at their home field then drive to the next pilot, thus forming a nationwide network of pilots who would fly across America.

That's when Maluk became involved. He was contacted by Geisler to participate due to his love of RC flying which has been a passion of his for two years. The plane will be flown by Maluk; a photo of himself and the plane will be taken and then driven to Neil Hunt of Accord, N.Y. who will do the same. "I should get the plane within this month, if not early September," Maluk told the Courier.

Maluk, a member of the Flying Hawks R/C club of Milford, was more conservative about the flight's length. "It's looking like its going to take about two years at this rate. Right now I'm scheduled to fly the plane at my local field and for a noon-time demo at NEAT, a big electric fly-in in New York State."

The equipment used for WAA-08 has been donated by the participating pilots. Fortunately, one of the pilots owns Stevens



Mike Maluk is pictured with one of his own radio controlled airplanes.

AeroModels in Colorado Springs, Colo. Bill Stevens donated a plane called a SQUIRT which stands for Simple, Quiet Reliable Trainer. This tough little 38" wingspan parkflyer is easy to fly and should take the abuse that over 250 pilots can dish out. Bill also talked his Horizon Hobby sales representative into donating their newest high-tech radio system to go along with the plane. Batteries and a charger were donated by Common Sense RC. To insure the batteries for the plane were safely transported, Big Al's Hobby Supply from Tupelo, Miss., donated a Lipo sack.

According to Maluk, "The RC community is always looking at ways to promote the hobby and introduce the fun, excitement, and learning opportunities this hobby has to offer to young adults. What better way is there then to fly a model airplane around the USA?" he said.

For more about the flight and its route, visit www.WAA-08.org . For more about NEAT, visit www.neatfair.org)