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3 generations fly RC plane in Richland event

By Loretto J. Hulse, Herald staff writer

RICHLAND — There's an airplane crossing the nation with no one in the pilot's seat. But there's no need to panic. When it's in the air, there's always someone in control on the ground.

It's battery powered and radio controlled. The model with a 38-inch wingspan is taking part in Wings Across America 2008 -- WAA-08. It was launched by Frank Geisier of Gloucester, Va., a longtime radio-controlled airplane hobbyist.

Geisier first flew the plane on May 24, 2008. It was flown eight more times by pilots in Virginia before leaving that state. Over the past two years, the plane has gone from one radio controlled hobbyist to another, flying steadily across the nation until it reached R. Scott and Danny Page of Richland.

Scott Page and his son are number 259 and 260 on the list of 363 model airplane pilots who signed up to receive the plane. They're members of the Miniature Aircraft Association (MAA) of the Tri-Cities, along with Danny's granddad, Ronald Page of West Richland.

The elder Page has been involved in radio-controlled airplanes for decades, but his son and grandson didn't pick up on the hobby until 2008.

"My grandpa got us a flight simulator for Christmas. It started with curiosity, and from there it evolved into a learning adventure," Danny Page said. "I really enjoy the excitement of trying different maneuvers."

The simulator also was what piqued Scott Page's interest.

"When I discovered I could fly planes without crashing, it was awesome," he said.

At 11 a.m. today, all three Pages will meet at the club's airfield, Higgins Field, outside Richland and send the plane soaring into the sky.

"As far as I know, we're the only three-generation pilot team to participate in Wings Across America," Scott Page said. "That makes us unique in a unique project."

Other model planes have made similar trips across the country. But what sets WAA-08 apart is that instead of packing the plane in its travel box and shipping it to the next pilot on the list, the Pages will drive to Spokane and personally hand it off to pilot number 261, Jerry Mudge of Spokane.

"Wings Across America is all about making personal connections between fellow model pilots. It's actually verboten to ship it," Scott Page said.

Being part of the project is exciting, Danny Page said. "It's good to be able to be involved with people with the same interests from far away."

Finding the time to deliver the plane to the next pilot on the list slows its journey somewhat, and so does inclement weather.

It can't be flown in rain or when it's snowing, because this one, like many of the newer model airplanes, is powered by batteries.

"Moisture shorts them out," Scott Page said. "They don't fly well when it's windy either. They tend to crash more."

"Saturday's forecast is for low winds, which is great news. You always run the risk of crashing with an unfamiliar plane, and I don't want to be the one who damages this one," Scott Page said.

Everyone with an interest in radio-controlled model planes or cars is welcome to join Tri-City MAA club members today.

Higgins Field is 1.5 miles south of Highway 240, off Highway 225. Look for the MAA sign.

For more information on the Tri-City club, go to www.my2wings.com.

* Loretto J. Hulse: 509-582-1513; lhulse@tricityherald.com