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For immediate release



McKinnon Airport to host world champion paper plane flier

Appearance at 'Adventures in Aviation' celebrates 100 years of flight in Georgia

Ken Blackburn has always loved airplanes. When he was just 10 years old, he began creating paper airplanes using designs he found in library books. At 13 he created a paper plane of his own design that “was great at flying high and circling down.” After years of practice creating and throwing paper planes, his college dorm mates put him up to challenging the world record for time aloft. He did it in 1983 in North Carolina State University’s Reynolds Coliseum by bettering the 15-second time listed in the Guinness Book of Records by 1.89 seconds.

By 1998, Blackburn had set three more records for an official time of 27.6 seconds – a record that still stands.

Blackburn will demonstrate his craft, teach big and little kids how to make paper airplanes, and conduct a time-aloft contest when he visits St. Simons Island on Oct. 20 for “Adventures in Aviation: A celebration of 100 years of flight in Georgia.”

Blackburn’s last record was a comeback attempt after two Englishmen had grabbed the record in 1996. Although he was working in St. Louis for McDonnell Douglas at the time, his sister in Atlanta, who headed a company that coordinates sports events, arranged for use of the Georgia Dome on Oct. 8, 1998. The time to beat this time was 20.9 seconds. Blackburn set about creating new, improved airplane designs, while working out three times a week for six months to build up his strength for the throws.

“The designs I tried included some all-new designs,” Blackburn says, “but I still had the most luck with my original design that I had invented as a 13-year-old kid. Along the way I found ways to make the design fly a little better, and a little more consistently.” Ultimately, Blackburn built hundreds of airplanes “not only to improve the design, but to find the best airplane using the best design.”

Finally, with CNN on hand to record the attempt (media video coverage is a Guinness requirement), Blackburn broke the world record four times out of his 10 official throws. The 10th throw yielded the astounding, never-duplicated time aloft of 27.6 seconds. “Better than I had ever hoped or dreamed,” he says.

Three autographed books by Blackburn will be given as contest prizes during his appearance at Adventures in Aviation. The event takes place Saturday, Oct. 20, from 4 to 7 p.m. at McKinnon St. Simons Island Airport. Sponsored by the Glynn County Airport Commission, the family event includes vintage and modern aircraft, tethered hot air balloon rides, activities, and food, concluding with a cinema-screen showing of “Flight of the Navigator” at 7 p.m. The event is free, and everyone is invited to bring a chair for the movie.

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