

Learning takes flight for school's fifth-graders

By ROSEMARY MARTINEZ
Contributor

The school year flew by in more ways than one for fifth-grade students at Mary Immaculate Catholic School in Farmers Branch.

The school partnered with Southwest Airlines in cross-curricular learning through the Adopt-a-Pilot Program. Captain Pat Gasper, a Coppell resident and six-year captain at Southwest Airlines who has been a pilot for the last 19 years, visited the class several times to help teach the four-week course.

The course took off with discussions on aviation and careers in the industry, and then continued with activities in science, math, geography, language arts and public speaking. The students honed their research and communication skills while tracking Gasper's weekly flight schedule and corresponding with the pilot while he was on his trips.

Student Tallie Pietragallo of Irving enjoyed Gasper's discussions on the weather.

"He talked about all different types of weather," Tallie said, "and about how wind direction can slow down an airplane and use more fuel."

Samantha Matz, a Carrollton resident, preferred his demonstrations with a miniature airplane wing.

"Captain Gasper told us about how the curve of the wing generates lift to overcome gravity and drag," she said.

The students were introduced to the hand signals and phonetic alphabet used by pilots and logged their own Adopt-a-Pilot experiences during the course. Topography and time zones were studied in the context of Gasper's flights, as were atlases and mileage charts. Air pressure and Bernoulli's Principle were put into effect with the help of balloons, blow dryers and ping pong balls.

A field trip to the Southwest Airlines facilities and Frontiers of Flight Museum at Dallas Love Field Airport added more perspective on aviation.

The studies came to a smooth landing with the study of the physics of flight, which they applied within the framework of paper airplane design. A final round of paper and balsa wood flight competitions closed out the program amid much cheering and celebrating.

Rosemary Martinez contributes to neighborsgo.com on behalf of Mary Immaculate Catholic School.



Southwest Airlines captain Pat Gasper works with Mary Immaculate Catholic School student Jennifer Rodriguez on extending the flight of her plane as part of the Adopt-a-Pilot Program.

Photos submitted by ROSEMARY MARTINEZ



Above: Lucy Calzada (left) of Addison, Julie Stokx of Coppell and Emma Schaller of Carrollton display their planes. **Below:** Brandon Zimmer of Farmers Branch watches his paper airplane fly.



Collin O'Hearn (left) and Alex Gonzalez enjoy the displays at Frontiers of Flight Museum.

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Left: Lucy Calzada (left) of Addison, Julie Stokx of Coppell and Emma Schaller of Carrollton display their planes.

Below left: Collin O'Hearn (left) of Coppell and Alex Gonzalez of Dallas enjoy the displays at Frontiers of Flight Museum.

Below: Brandon Zimmer of Farmers Branch watches his paper airplane fly.

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Submitted photos
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Mary Immaculate Catholic School students cheer each flight during their balsa-wood airplane competition.

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