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Gliders land at Sleepy Eye

Public invited to airport

July 9, 2011

By Fritz Busch - Staff Writer , The Journal

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SLEEPY EYE - Minnesota Soaring Club members silently circled, then glided to the Sleepy Eye Municipal Airport grass runway Friday and reacquainted themselves with each other.

For Sun Country Airlines pilot Jay Biggs of Inver Grove Heights, weekends with the soaring club are a big change of pace.

Most weekdays, he's flying a big passenger jet 525 mph at 25,000 feet across North America.

On Friday, he jumped into the soaring club's 50-year-old Piper Super Cub 160 at Stanton (near Northfield), started the motor and pulled a glider into the sky, southwest towards Sleepy Eye at about 100 mph top end.

Biggs said the air temperature was about 54 degrees on the way to Sleepy Eye, cool enough to cause him to close the window to stay comfortable.

"I enjoy being able to see so much more flying tow planes and gliders on weekends than I usually do (flying commercial planes)," Biggs said.

Growing up in Southern California, Biggs said he received flight training for free while in high school by bartering.

"After high school each weekday, I'd drive to the airport and wash airplanes and drive a field truck," Biggs added.

In recent years, Biggs said his favorite commercial flying destinations are Alaska in the summertime and Mexico and the Caribbean during the winter months.

For New Ulm native Peter Fischer, who lives in Roseville, meeting soaring club members at the Sleepy Eye Airport was a dream come true.

"I'm a glider groupie. I got my first ride today," Fischer said.

Gliding in big circles for about 45 minutes within sight of the airport, Fischer said he could hear the wind rushing by the glider but the ride was smooth for the most part.

"We hit a few bumps when we hit some warmer, rising air and began climbing," added Fischer.

Some of his other favorite pastimes include hiking in the Canadian Rockies and Yosemite National Park in California.

Soaring club members have traveled as far away as Utah, where they glide along the Wasatch Mountains.

Aided by supplemental oxygen tanks, soaring club gliders have climbed as high as 30,000 feet. They usually glide at about 2,500 feet on shorter trips and 5,000 feet on longer ones.

With more than 100 members of all ages and experience, the Minnesota Soaring Club website describes gliding as "the matchless grace and tranquility of silently and effortlessly slipping through the



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air."

Made of glass and carbon fiber, sail planes fly in formation with soaring birds like eagles, sharing warm, rising air currents.

The soaring clubhouse in Stanton has a computer, internet access, personal lockers, refreshments and barbecue grills for members.

The public is invited to watch the gliders and meet the pilots Saturday at the airport several miles southeast of Sleepy Eye.

For more information, please visit www.mnsoaringclub.com.

Fritz Busch can be e-mailed at fbusch@nujournal.com.

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