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Up Close with Hugh Tyler

Recently, we spoke to Hugh Tyler, Software Developer III, who has spent the last 13 years creating software for SunGard Public Sector in Chico, Calif. Hugh was a runner up in SunGard University's Vacation Photo Contest thanks to his photography skills and a rather distinctive hobby.



Tell us about the winning photo. (Pictured right)

I took the photo while flying a plane that I built. It was fun to win the photo contest with something I feel so passionate about.

That is impressive. How would you compare the skills needed to build a plane to those you use every day to build software?

In a way, they are related. Both are analytical in nature and to complete each one you must think a few steps ahead. You cannot just jump into building software or a plane.

When did you develop an interest in aviation?

I was about 10 when I flew for the first time. A friend of my father's was the pilot, and he let me work the controls while my father and brother sat in the back. My interest continued to grow, and after college, my then-girlfriend arranged for an acrobatic flight for my birthday. The following week, I began lessons and earned my pilot's license.

As a kid, did you have posters of the Wright Brothers hanging on your wall?

No, but I did build model airplanes and hung them from the ceiling.



How long does it take to get a pilot's license?

It requires a minimum of 40 hours of flight time but it takes most people more time than that. The flight time is divided into dual time with an instructor and solo time. You must also complete three cross country flights, each flight longer than the previous one. In all, the process took me about a year.

What is the most difficult part of flying?

Flying is intuitive to a point. It depends on the style of the plane, since they are all different. Landing is definitely the most difficult. You have to be extremely focused.



When did you decide build your own plane?

After I obtained my license, I saw an advertisement for a kit plane and my interest grew. I sold the antique plane I owned for seed money and shortly after, the kit arrived in four groups; first, the tail feathers (the end piece of an aircraft that gives it stability), then the wings, the fuselage (the main body of an aircraft), and finally, the canopy (the transparent enclosure over the cockpit) and fairings (non-structural pieces that increase aerodynamic efficiency). I always enjoyed working with my hands to build furniture, and since I enjoy flying, I thought how difficult could it be to build a plane? *(Pictured right: Hugh at the office; a rare photo op on the ground).*



How long did it take to build?

This particular model took six years to complete.

What was it like flying it for the first time?

It was a nerve-wracking flight for many reasons. It was so much faster than any other plane I've flown, sort of like going from a small Chevy to a racecar. It was that type of jump in performance.

Tell us about your longest flight as a pilot. Where did you go?

Most of my flights are short, and for fun and sport. I have made several long distance flights, the longest from California, to Texas, to Alabama, and onto Florida, when my wife and I visited family in Jacksonville. My bucket list contains another long distance flight to Maine in autumn to see the leaves change color.



Is your plane your prized possession?

Actually, I prefer older planes. I was part owner in a 1941 Navy N3N, a large tandem seat open cockpit biplane. The U.S. Navy used the plane throughout WWII, and it is the only plane the Navy ever built.

Who is a person in history that inspires you the most?

I'd have to say Charles Lindberg. He was an aviator, an inventor, author and explorer. Lindberg also worked as a daredevil, or stunt pilot. I became certified in flying formation this summer, which requires a lot of practice, almost as much as learning to fly.

That seems more dangerous than flying.

It is considering how close you actually have to fly to other planes to make the formation look right. In the group I fly with, we use a 20-foot wingtip to wingtip clearance, and a propeller to tail clearance of 15 feet. You have to have complete trust in the other members of the team.