

How do you top a day when General Aviation's most recognizable and most effective advocate, Harrison Ford, walks up to your T-28A static display setup, puts a few bills in the donation jar and says "I appreciate what you guys are doing. Keep up the good work."?

And just what was it that we were doing that garnered that appreciation?

Fourteen staunch supporters of the Hixson Museum of Flight met in the hangar "Ready Room" at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday, June 2nd, 2012 in order to review some ambitious plans and grand schedule. Hixson's two T-28 aircraft had been exercised the day before at the Dallas Bay field, but now it was time to put them both on display at a different venue. They needed to be towed out of the hangar, fired up and flown to Chattanooga Municipal Airport. There, they'd land and taxi to park in front of the TAC Air North FBO, where museum members would unload a box truck worth of simulated ordnance, field desks, fire extinguishers and many other military pieces of gear in order to create a visually exciting static display scene around one of the planes.



The scene, and the stairs pushed against the side of the cockpit, was assembled for the benefit of some children in fragile health who are under the care of Children's Hospital at Erlanger. They and their families were invited to come out, inspect the equipment, look at the imposingly large Vietnam-era planes AND crawl in the cockpit... touch stuff, sit, imagine.

The sparkling blue sky day with mild temperatures undoubtedly saw many an imaginary sortie launched from that flight line.



With the important families taken care of, the next order of business was hosting local Channel 9 TV reporter Don Welch so that he could help spread the word about the museum and its' two core missions of 1) increasing the public's awareness of aviation through the preservation and flight of historical aircraft while 2) supporting the local children's hospital. In front of the ever-present cameraman, Don went through a flight brief, not-quite-squeezed into a flight suit and safety gear, clambered up the side of the T-28B Trojan trainer and then went for a flight with museum President Pete O'Hare at the controls; the latter, explaining everything about the operation of the plane and the people who make the museum a living, breathing reality.

It was at that point when Harrison Ford (who by happenstance had stopped at the same FBO for fuel during his own flying adventure), had seen enough and made a contribution to our donation jar.

Other museum members went aloft in the T-28B for a familiarization flight as it took to the sky over downtown Chattanooga throughout the afternoon.

Finally, the day waning, the static display gear was returned to the truck and the T-28's were made ready to leave. This was not, however, the end of the show; rather, it was the beginning of a sequence of aerial photo shoots that would have the two T-28's fly in formation off expert photographer Greg Davis' Cessna 172. Once airborne, Greg's long lens tracked the planes through the sky and over the waters of the Tennessee River and tributaries. Chasing the "Golden Moment" of warm wavelength light just before sunset, the aircraft swirled in arcs that, when frozen by the click of a shutter, can lead to magazine cover-worthy pictures.



Perhaps the REAL golden moment occurred some thirteen or more hours after the initial meeting in the morning; with our aircraft safely back in the hangar, with the memory of kids who had enjoyed their excursion with us and with many award-quality pictures having been taken. Those pictures, after some massaging and processing, will come to visually define Hixson Museum of Flight for many years to come.

How do you top a day like that?

You make more of them.