



KIDS HIT THE SKY FOR WOMEN IN AVIATION FUNDRAISER EVENT

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Katelyn Guzman wore a huge smile as she walked across the tarmac, her thick braid fluttering in the wind.

“It was cool,” said Katelyn, 10, who’d just taken a ride in a Glasair II airplane at Sun Valley Aviation.

She and her mother Carolyn had come out to the “Hangar Fiesta,” a fundraiser for the new **Women in Aviation** Rio Grande Valley Chapter.

Children were taken on rides in small planes to introduce them to flying. A band called Coyote Brothers performed country music and classic rock, and hot dogs and hamburgers were served.

Women in Aviation, International is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing networking, education, mentoring and scholarship opportunities for women — and men — who are striving for challenging and fulfilling careers in the aviation and aerospace industries. There are numerous chapters across the United States.

On Saturday, the organization also was celebrating Girls in Aviation Day 2015.

Ana Ayala King, president, said the Valley chapter was formed in May by herself, Elizabeth Robertson and Laura Gutierrez-Garcia. King is a professional pilot and the other two are working

on their private pilot's license.

The organization already has about 15 members. King said the chapter's purpose is to encourage girls and women to pursue aviation-related professions. They can be pilots, air traffic controllers, aircraft mechanics or any number of other professions.

And of course there's always the option of just earning a pilot's license for the sheer joy of flying.

Many people are daunted by the expense of earning a simple pilot's license. King earned a four-year degree in aeronautical science to become a commercial pilot, and it was extremely expensive. One of the messages she wants to communicate is there are all kinds of financial assistance available.

Often it's not just about grades, it's about the applicant's "passion" for flying, she said.

"We are trying to grow the chapter and recruit new members and just promote it," said King, 28.

She currently flies businessmen and women and their families to different parts of the Valley. Previously she was a commercial airline pilot based first in Honolulu and then in Charleston, South Carolina.

She loves the feeling of being in the pilot's seat.

"It's just the serenity," said the McAllen native. "It's calm. But it's a challenge. The sunrises and sunsets make it all worthwhile. The view."

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