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## Women aviators convene at airport's first open house

BY LINDSAY WINSLOW BROWN [lindsayb@kpcnews.net](mailto:lindsayb@kpcnews.net)  
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AUBURN — When Dee Ditton was a little girl during World War II, she used to build model airplanes and wipe excess cement-like glue on the arm of her parent's sofa. She tossed dolls aside and dreamed of being a pilot.

Now 75 years old, Ditton is an experienced aviator who pushes other women to fly.

Ditton came with fellow Ninety-Nines — an international group of women aviators — to the DeKalb County Airport's first open house Saturday afternoon wearing a T-shirt that said "A woman's place is in the cockpit."

The open house was sponsored by the DeKalb County Airport, the Hoosier Air Museum and Century Aviation.

Ditton stands about 5 feet tall and is wiry in stature and personality. She's no stranger to hard work, and she has an opinion on everything — from health care to Amelia Earhart.

Although she longed for the open sky as a child, she didn't climb into a cockpit until she was in her late 40s. Ditton said she had to take care of earth responsibilities such as raising a family and working as a nurse.

In 1980, she finally took a flying lesson, and her friends and family weren't surprised.

"They knew I would do it," Ditton said.

She said that when the wheels of her single-engine Cherokee 180 leave the runway, she loves to yell, "yee haw."

"Flying is therapy," Ditton said. "It's the best place to relax."

### Images



LINDSAY WINSLOW BROWN Lewie Wiese, left, and Dee Ditton, both of Fort Wayne sit on the recently painted decorative compass rose at the DeKalb County Airport Saturday during the airport's first open house.



LINDSAY WINSLOW BROWN Lewie Wiese climbs out of her twin-engine plane while her friend, Dee Ditton, watches during the DeKalb County Airport's first open house Saturday. Wiese and Ditton both belong to the Ninety-Nines, an international group of female aviators.



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### Calendar

Ditton joined the Ninety-Nines in the early 1980s, she said, because she was asked by one of her instructors.

Another Ninety-Nine member, Lewie Wiese of Fort Wayne, also attended Saturday's open house. She joined the group for the camaraderie, friendships and educational opportunities.

Wiese started flying in 1978 in Hawaii while her husband, Verne, was in the service.

Wiese's husband was a pilot, and she wanted to learn to fly so that she wasn't always the passenger. She admitted that she often got carsick and thought she'd feel a little less queasy in the driver's seat.

"It wasn't until I was way into flying that I started to enjoy it," Wiese said.

Since she got her license, Wiese said, flying has been her main method of transportation. She has visited her family in Nebraska by plane for 26 years, and she has no plans to travel by car.

As she smiled from beneath her wide-brimmed hat while wearing large, black sunglasses, she said she owns three-quarters of a plane. She and her husband own a twin-engine, and she's a quarter owner of a Warrior.

She occasionally ventures to DeKalb County for different airport events. This past month, she helped airport manager Russ Couchman, Century Aviation chief pilot Laura Zook Gaerte and local volunteers paint a decorative compass rose on a pad just to the south of the airport building.

While adjusting her Ninety-Nine earrings, Wiese explained that markings such as the compass rose used to be painted on the tops of buildings to help pilots navigate before the days of radios and radars.

Some of Wiese's friends — pilot Linda Pulver of Auburn and former pilot Rose (Peckhart) Ray, an Auburn native — also attended the open house.

Pulver said she became a pilot after a dare in 1983.

"There were a couple of us who were going to see who got their license first," Pulver said.

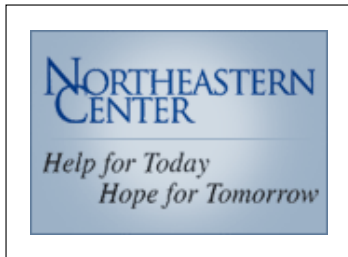
Ray, Pulver's aunt, likes to think she was inspirational in her niece's desire to be a pilot. Ray started flying because her husband, who received his instrument rating, needed an assistant. Rather than have someone else sit beside her husband in the cockpit, she started taking lessons.

LINDSAY WINSLOW BROWNFemale aviators Auburn native Rose (Peckhart) Ray, Dee Ditton of Fort Wayne, Linda Pulver of Auburn and Lewie Wiese of Fort Wayne give thumbs up to women pilots. The four attended DeKalb County Airport's first open house Saturday afternoon.



LINDSAY WINSLOW BROWN Auburn native Rose (Peckhart) Ray and her niece, Linda Pulver, attended DeKalb County Airport's first open house Saturday afternoon. Ray is a former pilot, and Pulver still holds her license.





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