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Lifestyle

G FORCE

Cyclists raise money to provide free medical flights

By June Wulff | GLOBE STAFF | JULY 24, 2012



KEITH D'ENTREMONT

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WHO

Scott Havemeyer

WHAT

Havemeyer is the coordinator of "Ride for Angels," a Sept. 9 bike ride to benefit Angel Flight Northeast. This nonprofit organization serving nine states provides free flights from several northeast airports to people who need access to medical care in Boston and surrounding communities. On July 24, Charlestown's Tavern on the Water hosts "Night for a Flight," a fund-raiser for the bike ride. Go to www.nightforaflight.eventbrite.com or www.angelflightne.org.

Q. How did Angel Flight Northeast get off the ground?

A. Prior to starting Angel Flight Northeast in 1996, Larry Camerlin owned an ambulance company and was a hospital pastor for many years. Larry saw a need for this service in the area and decided to start a northeast chapter of the national organization. He is also a private pilot.

"The children . . . get excited about [the flight]. It becomes less laborious and scary for them to go to treatment, and they get excited about the ride."

Q. How did you get involved with the group?

A. I'm a physical therapist, and a few years ago I met Larry as a patient and found out a little more about Angel Flight Northeast. I was very impressed with what they do.

Q. What is its mission?

A. To provide free flights for adults and children to access medical care that they would otherwise have difficulty accessing. Volunteer pilots have flown more than 65,000 patients and companions more than 12 million miles to medical care.

Q. How is it funded? Recipients pay nothing?

A. The network behind it is the volunteer pilots, more than 1,000, who donate their time and their own planes. They are the backbone. Angel Flight coordinators field calls, take requests, coordinate flights, match patients with pilots, and coordinate the Ground Angels who help with ground transportation.

Q. How do folks hear about this service?

A. There's a lot of community outreach and a lot of networking with local hospitals and medical facilities. And events like "Night for a Flight" raise funds and awareness.

Q. Tell me about the pilots.

A. They come from all walks of life and backgrounds. Some are doctors, lawyers, engineers, retired commercial pilots, and general aviation enthusiasts.

Q. What kinds of planes do they use?

A. Most are small single-engine planes; it depends on the pilots and what they have access to.

Q. Forty percent of the passengers are kids. Are they able to enjoy the ride?

A. The children I have had experiences with get excited about it. It becomes less laborious and scary for them to go to treatment, and they get excited about the ride.

Q. There was a fatal accident in 2008 when two passengers and the pilot were killed in a parking lot on the way from a Long Island airport to Logan. That must have been devastating for the organization.

A. Any loss is a huge tragedy, and knowing that these pilots cared so much and were going so much out of their way to help people just added to the devastation.

Q. Tell me about the "Night for a Flight" fund-raiser in Charlestown and the September "Ride for Angels" bike ride.

A. I'm an avid cyclist and have ridden in a variety of charity events. Finding out about this organization started me thinking about helping in a larger way. In 2011 I created and organized a "Ride for Angels" charity cycling event with all proceeds going to "Angel Flight Northeast." Last year was our first year and we had 53 riders and raised just over \$8,000. The second ride takes place Sept. 9 and there will be four ride lengths to choose from: 20, 40, 65, and 100 miles. The ride starts and finishes in North Andover at Angel Flight Northeast's Lawrence Municipal Airport headquarters. Our goal is \$50,000.

Q. What's on the horizon for the organization?

A. "Angel Flight Northeast" is at a critical point because of the economy. They have more demand now than ever, and trying to fund and maintain the organization has become more challenging. Angel Flight Northeast has never turned down a flight request, and their goal is to continue to never say no.

Interview has been edited and condensed. June Wulff can be reached at jwulff@globe.com.

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