

The Wright Stuff

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The Wright Stuff — Wright Flyer Soars Again

The air smelled of fresh rain, the ground was damp and the birds whistled high in the treetops overlooking historic Huffman Prairie Flying Field. I watched as the plane, a futuristic replica of a Wright brothers' aircraft, soared toward the prairie in the cool morning sky. The USU Wright Flyer circled the prairie above a crowd of onlookers who cheered wildly as it completed its first circle. Piloted by Utah State University alum Wayne Larsen, a crop duster from Brigham City, the USU Wright Flyer made history that morning by becoming the first plane to fly over Huffman Prairie Flying Field since Orville and Wilbur Wright had done so nearly 100 years ago.

Each year, thousands of flight buffs visit Huffman Prairie Flying Field near Dayton, Ohio, to visit the site where the Wright brothers perfected the craft of flying. After completing their first test flights on Dec. 17, 1903, in Kitty Hawk, N.C., the Wrights returned home to Ohio to tinker with their aircraft and to conduct many more test flights. It was at Huffman Prairie Flying Field that the Wrights finessed the flyer's maneuverability and success in flight. After two years and more than 10,000 hours of hard work, the USU Wright Flyer team saw dreams become reality as Larsen retraced the flights of the inventors of aviation. "This was an emotional experience for me and it was a fantastic experience for me," said Larsen about the flight. "We had help in the seats today. It was as though the Wright brothers were sitting next to me." The USU Wright Flyer started out as an idea that quickly came to fruition thanks to the help and support from many donors. The brainchild of Utah State associate professor of industrial technology and education Dave Widauf and his retired colleague Charles Larsen, the flyer is a success. But it was through the many Utah State engineering students who dedicated themselves to the project that the USU Wright Flyer finally took flight.

The students, mentored by Widauf and Larsen, saw to every aspect of the project. A group of mechanical engineering students took on the responsibility to design the aircraft while a group of aviation maintenance students built the aircraft. Many of the students, as well as Widauf and Larsen, were on hand to witness the special flight that would bring the USU Wright Flyer to the high point of its career. As the plane landed on a nearby landing

strip at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and taxied over to the prairie, there were many tears of joy and shouts of adulation. And because the team wants to give the opportunity to see the aircraft in flight in the historic location, the USU Wright Flyer will now call the Dayton Aviation National Historical Park home. "A great partnership has arisen from hundreds of miles away," said Steven Wright, great-grandnephew of the Wright brothers (pictured at the right with his sister, Amanda Wright-Lane). "Utah State has been so unselfish in letting us have this machine here in Dayton on exhibit. For years, people would come to Dayton to see a Wright machine and they would have to see it sitting on the ground. Now people can come from all over the world to see a Wright machine fly in the air. It's a beautiful profile and a machine that really looks like a Wright machine.

We would like to thank everyone involved in the project." Ohio celebrates throughout the month of July with the Centennial Flight Celebration in Dayton, and the USU Wright Flyer team was grateful to be included as part of the events. The team attended the opening ceremony for the centennial celebration and President George Bush's Independence Day speech at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where the team was in the VIP area. The group will stay on in Dayton to display the flyer at Huffman Prairie as well as at the Wright Memorial before ending the once-in-a-lifetime experience at the Dayton Vectron Airshow near the end of the month. The USU Wright Flyer will be missed in Utah, but the team celebrates as it makes the flyer available to thousands at the cradle of aviation, Huffman Prairie. Contact: Trina Paskett (435) 797-4678, (435) 881-2823 [trina.pasket@usu.edu] Writer: Maren Cartwright (435) 797-1355 [maren.cartwright@usu.edu]