

Arley man wins plane from national charity



Arley Pilot Chris Cookenmaster receives his key from Don Hoerstkamp of the St. Louis, Mo.-based charity Wings for Hope at the Walker County Airport on Friday. Cookenmaster won the plane in a raffle that sold 4,000 tickets. Daily Mountain Eagle - Ed Howell

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BY ED HOWELL, DAILY MOUNTAIN EAGLE

An Arley man won a Cessna 172 plane from a national charity, which flew the plane into the Walker County Airport in Jasper on Friday.

Chris Cookenmaster, 36, and his family gathered at the airport Friday morning, waiting for the plane to be delivered. It arrived about 30 minutes late from St. Louis, Mo., due to winds, but that did not stop the family from being excited about the development.

"I've never won anything," said Cookenmaster, who noted that he was shocked when called to be told his name was drawn.

"Who wins an airplane? Nobody does. It probably took me a half hour to be talked into it" when he was called about his win, he said.

He said he usually flies out of Addison. However, officials with the charity, Wings of Hope (<https://wingsofhope.ngo>) of St. Louis, Mo., wanted to land in Jasper for various reasons.

The plane will eventually be stored in Addison.

A spokeswoman for the charity said in a recent email the organization “raffles off an airplane twice a year to raise money for our Medical Relief & Air Transport (MAT) Program, where we transport patients to lifesaving health care throughout the country.

This past September, 4,000 raffle tickets sold out in a record 12 hours — raising more than \$170,000.”

In addition, Cookenmaster said he won \$10,000 for upgrades to the plane, including a new GPS, radio and other electronic systems.

Cookenmaster, who runs Cookenmaster Construction in Arley, said, “I got my (pilot) license several months ago and I’ve been flying about three years now. I have about 120 hours flying.”

He discovered the contest on Facebook.

“They were only selling 4,000 tickets,” he said, noting a friend told him he would never win and to not waste his money.

Cookenmaster spent \$125 on tickets anyway, saying he would like to help the charity out.

The new plane is an upgrade from the two-seater plane that he has been flying. “The one I won will hold four people and goes a whole lot faster,” he said, as well as having better equipment in it. “It is a great plane. And it has all been redone — new paint, new interior, the motor overhauled and everything.”

Don Hoerstkamp, Wings of Hope’s chief pilot for retrieval, delivery and maintenance, who flew the plane in and handed the keys over to Cookenmaster, said Wings of Hope is an aviation charity which flies many sick children to hospitals, including burn treatment centers and those treating cancer, including the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas.

“Our operation in the states is based primarily east of the Rockies. We also aid and assist overseas charities. We have bases we work with in Africa, South America, Nepal, and not all of those are aviation. I know in Nepal we provided two buses that were converted to clinics. It is a varied organization,” Hoerstkamp said.

About 98 percent of the people involved in the non-profit organization are volunteers, he said, with very few paid staff.

Hoerstkamp said the raffle is widely popular, noting tickets were even sold overseas and can be purchased online.