

Two pilots, Albert Cassens students work on Guinness Book of Records paper plane launch mark

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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Albert Cassens Elementary in Glen Carbon currently has an interesting Adopt-A-Pilot program with two Southwest Airlines pilots, Scott Fitzgerald and Marvin Meng.

Both Fitzgerald and Meng have children in Edwardsville Community School District 7. Meng's daughter attends Cassens Elementary. Fitzgerald has one child at Liberty Middle School and another at Edwardsville High School.

Albert Cassens Principal Martha Richey said she is ecstatic about the work the two pilots have done with her fifth grade classes.

All fifth-grade classes at the school are in the program with Fitzpatrick and Meng. The goal is to attempt to break the Guinness Book of Records for highest paper plane launch. The present record is 96,000 feet. The classes, led by the two men, will attempt to crack the mark in a few weeks. In preparation for the official launch, a practice launch was performed on Friday.

"The airplanes have to be made out of paper or card products," Fitzgerald said. "We wanted to do a test with drop testers today (Friday). We will use a weather balloon filled with helium. We have the expertise and technology to do something different. We have done 15 successful balloon launches from 65,000 feet to a little over 100,000 feet."

Fitzgerald said he thinks the present project with Albert Cassens Elementary is a neat one.

"We are hopeful we can do it," he said. "Anyone with Internet access should be able to track the balloon in real time. If we get a bigger balloon, it should take a little over two hours. As we go up in altitude, this balloon expands and it should get quite large."

Meng's daughter, Sara, beamed with pride on Friday as he and Fitzgerald prepared for the test launch in front of the Cassens fifth-graders. The students had a discussion about the test launch outside the school, then lined up enthusiastically to watch Fitzgerald, Meng and a few student helpers go to work.

"I think by doing this, it is something they can get a lot more confidence when faced with challenges of the future," he said. "I am very proud of my daughter and to do this with the Cassens fifth-graders."

Fitzgerald and Meng have been presenting a series of modules that cross the curriculum in math, science, and language arts and include: goal setting, following the route and calculating the miles flown by the pilot weekly, studying time zones and calculating the current time in any state, designing a travel brochure, and studying the forces of flight. These lessons support and enrich the curriculum at fifth grade, Principal Richey said.

As an extension of the Adopt A Pilot program, Fitzgerald and Meng offered to facilitate a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) activity to involve all fifth-grade students at Cassens Elementary in an exciting learning activity aimed at breaking a Guinness Records.

“The biggest thing is taking an idea and turning it into something real,” Fitzgerald said. “Ever since we have done this, we have tried to figure out how to start with a concept and make it a reality. We have tried to put it into manageable parts and assembled it back together to create a template to any goal they establish.”





