

"Become a Pilot" Family Day a Mix of Rain and Shine

By Ryan Lytle, LoudounExtra.com

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Scattered thunderstorms early Saturday morning did not dismay people from attending the fifth annual "Become a Pilot" Family Day at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly.

At one point, the Center predicted a total of 109 planes would take part in the event, but fell short of that number due to the inclement weather that kept many pilots from making the trip.

Bill and Rhonda Kline of Inglis, Fla. said they flew into the area earlier in the week.

"We flew in on Thursday, so we are very happy," Rhonda Kline said. "We're from Florida, though, so we're used to the rain."

Although weather kept some planes away, the flow of people attending this year's event patterned its previous years.

"It's really hard to predict how many will come out today," said Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center's Public Affairs Specialist Frank McNally. "We've had anywhere between 15,000 and 18,000 people in the previous four years, but we've had really good weather."

The Center's "rain or shine" policy was prepared to cater to its guests in case of poor conditions.

The indoor portion of the event provided activities for all ages, from a kids version of pilot training school to virtual flight simulators to guest speakers.

"The event really epitomizes what we are intending to do," McNally said. "And that is to educate, commemorate and inspire. Educate the current generation, commemorate the heroes of the past and inspire future generations to become a part of math, science, aviation and space."

Along with these activities was the U.S. Air Force's vocal band, Max Impact, which provided an up-tempo style of music to an already energetic crowd.

As the day progressed, the conditions outside began to improve considerably, allowing people to take full advantage of the outdoor activities. This improvement in weather gave the Center reason to be positive about the day.

"Even though there was a little rain, people were happy with the events inside and when it cleared up outside people rushed back out," McNally said. "It was terrific."