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NEWS

Actors portray aviation pioneers

By Natalie Jordan
Rocky Mount Telegram

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The year was 1901 and two brothers dreamed of the clouds but landed in ditches.

Telegram photo / Alan Campbell
(ENLARGE)

David ZumBrunnen, left, dressed as Wilbur Wright, talks Tuesday with students Kathryn Greisiger, Haley Coppedge and Alexis Bryant, from left, at Englewood Elementary School.

Students at Englewood Elementary School took a trip back in time Tuesday as two actors from an Apex-based production company told the story of the Wright Brothers while building an abstract replica of the Wright Flyer – the first successful airplane.

"The most memorable flight was when me and my brother flew together," David ZumBrunnen, who played the role of Wilbur Wright, told the students. "If you're going to fly, all you need is knowledge and skill."

The assembly, "The Wrights of Passage," was split into two sessions, with kindergarten through second grade going first and third through fifth grade afterward. The event was made possible through Elizabeth Scott, the school's Parent Teacher Student Association assembly chairwoman.

"We try to make the assemblies educational," said Monica Seaman, a Parent Teacher Student Association board member. "And I thought they did really good. I thought it was really educational. Even the kindergarten through second-graders got something out of it. We try to get assemblies like this throughout the year."

While building the abstract replica of the plane's wings, ZumBrunnen and Stephen Wall, who played the role of Orville Wright, gave facts about aviation with the help of some students in the front rows. Wall said going through the timeline allows the students to see the developments that occurred.

"I thought it was really funny and educational," said third-grader Dequon Harris, 9. "I liked how they acted while telling the timeline. That was cool.

"I'll remember that any time I think I can't do something to think of the Wright brothers."

Originally commissioned by the N.C. Association of Educators, ZumBrunnen and Wall have traveled throughout the state performing "The Wrights of Passage." With about 200 shows under their belts, the duo has been performing for the last three years.

"Of course the subject matter is of importance to the students and teachers, especially here in North Carolina," Wall said. "But this brings live theater into the schools, which I think is great. It engages the kids, and we're always amazed at how into it the kids are.

"Usually we can tell how a show will go within the first five minutes, but this school was great. The students here are eager to learn and have fun."

But through the fun parts of the re-enactment, a message stood out – never give up.

"As we do this, we've learned more about the Wright brothers than we expected to, which has enhanced our enjoyment of doing this," ZumBrunnen said. "What everyone should understand is that they made a lot of mistakes, but through those trials of error, they found a way to make it work."

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