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## Actors take story of first flight to N.C. schools

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KITTY HAWK — December 17, 1903, 10:30 a.m.

One-hundred-twenty feet in 12 seconds.

The man taking pictures did something photographers never do.

He stopped and stared.

“They done it!” another witness reportedly yelled through the streets of Kitty Hawk. “They done it!”

Days earlier, lifeguards on the stormy beach had laughed as Orville and Wilbur Wright rolled their 600-pound contraption across the frozen sand, fighting icy gusts of wind.

“Who’s going to be the first to fly that crazy power-bird?” they mocked.

Orville was.

Days before achieving the first documented human flight, the Wright brothers flipped a coin.

That dark Thursday, it was Orville’s turn to fly.

A telegram went out from the Kitty Hawk Weather Bureau later that day, marked for Dayton, Ohio.

The first thing Bishop Milton Wright noticed about the now-famous telegram was his son’s name had been misspelled.

“Success four flights Thursday morning all against twenty one mile wind started from level with engine power alone average speed through air thirty one miles longest 57 seconds inform press home christmas. orevelle wright,” the telegram read.

Six years later, Bishop Wright glimpsed another miracle as his sons flew together.

“As our eighty-year-old father watched below, we could barely hear him shout, “Higher, boys, higher!” Wilbur Wright told eighth-graders at Burns Middle School Thursday.

Actually it was David zum Brunnen, an actor with Ebzb Productions from the Raleigh-Durham area, who told students the story of flight while portraying the character of the older Wright brother.

He and Orville, played by Stephen Wall, constructed a life-sized model of a glider in the school’s Little Theatre, while narrating the Wright brothers’ story.

The 40-minute production, called “Wrights of Passage,” was performed at schools across Cleveland County this week, to celebrate the upcoming 100-year anniversary of aviation.

The play was sponsored by The Star’s Newspapers-in-Education program and commissioned by the North Carolina Association of Educators.

Students participated by reading chronologically arranged “flight facts” to their peers throughout the

performance.

"In 1300, explorer Marco Polo reports human-carrying kites in China," Sara Lewis read to the crowded auditorium.

The actors' model accurately detailed the Wrights' ingenuity, right down to the piano wire and muslin cloth used "to achieve lateral control" wings.

Part of the muslin on the original plane was later used in a wedding dress, zum Brunnen told students.

"We spend hours watching birds fly and trying to duplicate their wings," he said. "After testing it over 700 times, it is clear we have to add an engine. Our "flying machine" is so big we barely have room in our bicycle shop to serve our customers."

Students said the performance gave them a historical perspective on the Wrights' accomplishment.

"I didn't know that much about it," Miss Lewis said. "I thought the first flight was longer than it actually was."

"It was interesting how they talked and acted it out," said Toni Walker.

"I learned how the first plane looked," said classmate Janiesha Kennedy.

Zum Brunnen said his wife, Serena Ebhardt, wrote the play, and he and Wall conducted their own research on the Wrights.

"Wrights of Passage" will be touring public schools across North Carolina for the rest of the year.

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