

HIGH DESERT

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LAURA STREPPONE, SPECIAL TO THE DAILY PRESS

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: Southwest Airlines Capt. Phil Howard takes questions from students of the Academy for Academic Excellence. Howard was at the school for its Adopt-A-Pilot program on Friday.

ACADEMIC AIRLINES

Adopt-a-Pilot program comes to Apple Valley school

BY LYNNEA LOMBARDO / STAFF WRITER

APPLE VALLEY • A pilot from Southwest Airlines visited some classes on Friday at the Academy for Academic Excellence, becoming an instant celebrity among the young students who all vied to get his attention.

“I’m a lonely pilot for Southwest Airlines and I need a family,” said Capt. Phil Howard to an audience of captive fifth graders. “Will you adopt me?”

Roughly 100 students screamed “yes” in unison, as Howard flashed his young fans an appreciative smile.

Howard, who has been flying for 27 years, is volunteering for the Adopt-a-Pilot program through Southwest Airlines. The program is a semester-long curriculum designed to teach students about the joys of flying, geography and travel, said Donna Metcalfe, an AAE teacher spearheading the program.

“I’ve tried for three years to get our school signed up for this program,” Metcalfe said of the interactive course. “Third time’s a charm.”

Metcalfe said that she was in the travel business for 20 years before becoming a teacher and believes that there is a lot to be learned through traveling and flying.

“I want the kids to consider the world of travel as a career,” Metcalfe said.

Howard gave a detailed presentation about his storied career in the Air Force and how he learned to fly and indulged the students in an extensive question-and-answer session.

“What do you do when the engine fails?” asked one fifth grader. “Have you ever crashed a plane?” asked another.

Howard answered these and several other questions, pausing to share funny situations and short stories along the way. “Did you know that Southwest Airlines was created on a napkin?” Howard asked the students. Roughly 1,000 pilots have been “adopted” by 40,000 students nationwide, said Howard.

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LAURA STREPPONE/FOR THE DAILY PRESS

CAPTAIN FOR A DAY: Student Sandra Chaidec gets crowned captain by Howard as Nykah Williams, dressed in an Air Force flight suit, looks on during the Adopt-A-Pilot program on Friday.



