

February 2, 2012

By The AVweb Editorial Staff

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AVflash! "The Start of an Exciting Journey ..."

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Stratolaunch Starts Construction In Mojave

Stratolaunch Systems, the new company formed in December by Paul Allen to build a giant Burt Rutan-designed aircraft that will launch payloads into Earth orbit, has started construction on a production facility and a hangar at the Mojave Air and Space Port in California. Over the next year, the company plans to tear down a pair of 747-400 aircraft and salvage parts and subsystems to integrate into the new airplane. "Today marks the start of an exciting journey for us," said Gary Wentz, CEO of Stratolaunch. "We look forward to many years of great work in Mojave." The two new buildings together will comprise about 180,000 square feet of workspace and offices.



The fabrication facility is projected to be completed late this year, and the hangar has a projected completion date of mid-2013. The Stratolaunch, which will be the world's largest airplane, will weigh 1.2 million pounds, with a 385-foot wingspan. Plans call for six jet engines like those used on 747s, and booster rocket engines from Elon Musk's SpaceX. Test flights are planned for 2015.

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Funding the FAA

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GA Groups Welcome FAA Funding Bill

Aviation organizations reacted with relief this week to [news](#) that a \$63

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billion, four-year FAA funding bill has finally been agreed on in Washington. **AOPA said**, "General aviation pilots can celebrate" -- the bill left out user fees and doesn't increase taxes for avgas or jet fuel. The bill makes it possible for the government to create an incentive program to help GA pilots equip for NextGen, and authorizes \$13.4 billion for airport improvement projects. It also addresses **through-the-fence operations**, allowing airport access to adjacent property owners. Other aviation groups, such as NBAA, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, and the Air Line Pilots Association, also reacted positively to the news.



NBAA President Ed Bolen said the "business aviation community understands that a long-term measure is the best way to ensure that the agency has the guidance needed to pursue long-term initiatives, including implementation of a Next Generation Air Traffic System ... so that our aviation system can meet the needs of the future." Lee Moak, president of ALPA, said, "Overall, this is a very strong aviation safety bill," but he added that he'll comment further after staffers have had time to review the bill in detail. There are some provisions that ALPA would prefer to see removed before the final bill is passed, he said. NATCA President Paul Rinaldi said, "Long-term funding -- including vital funds for the NextGen air traffic control system -- will lead to safer and more reliable air travel. ... We urge swift passage of this bill." For about five years, the FAA has limped along with 23 short-term funding appropriations from Congress. The Senate and House now need to vote on the bill before Feb. 17, when the current short-term bill expires, but it is expected to pass.

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[More on Hartzell Engine Technologies' aircraft starters ...](#)

Eye on Jobs

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## American Wants To Slash 13,000 Jobs

About 400 pilots are affected by sweeping layoffs proposed by American Airlines as it tries to emerge from bankruptcy. In a plan unveiled Wednesday, the airline announced it will lay off 13,000 employees, about 15 percent of its workforce, cancel unprofitable routes and retire old inefficient aircraft. "We are going to use the restructuring process to make the necessary changes to meet our challenges head-on and capitalize fully on the solid foundation we've put in place," CEO Thomas Horton said in a letter to employees. The employees have a different take.



Unions universally characterized the cuts as unacceptably harsh and questioned Horton's math. The CEO said the cuts would save the company, which lost almost \$1.8 billion last year, \$1.25 billion a year and the unions put the tally at about \$2.8 billion. Regardless of the true numbers, the cuts seem poised to cost 4,600 maintenance workers, 4,200 baggage handlers, 2,300 flight attendants and 1,400 management and support workers their jobs in addition to the pilots. American has to attempt to negotiate with the unions to achieve the cuts but if those talks fail it can put its case before a federal judge to impose them as part of the plan to emerge from bankruptcy.

## DOT OIG: FAA Faces Controller Shortage

Southern California, Atlanta, Chicago and New York were identified as areas that face the risk of having too few controllers as veteran controllers retire, according to a report ([PDF](#)) by the Department of Transportation. The FAA anticipated the problem, but efforts to train new recruits have seen too many fail to qualify for work at high-traffic facilities. To complicate matters, the report says those high-traffic facilities have seen attrition rates above the national average and many hold high numbers of controllers eligible to retire. The report concluded that "the Nation's most critical air traffic control facilities are facing significant staffing shortages" that "could lead to potential risks to

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their daily operations." The FAA has a different opinion and has issued a statement.

According to the FAA, the agency "continues to meet its overall goals for hiring, training time to certification and the number of certified controllers." Its training plan has produced "more than 5,000 certified professional controllers" over the past five years. According to the report, from 2008 to 2010, only 23 percent of controller trainees in the New York radar control area moved on to become certified controllers. Los Angeles posted similar numbers. The Office of Inspector General, which prepared the report for the DOT, found that "the FAA's national training program has not provided critical facilities with the training resources they need to help slow staffing shortfalls." The report recommended that "enhanced oversight of staffing and training" would be needed "to maintain continuity of air traffic operations."

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Law & Liability

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**Pilot Charged With Manslaughter In Crash**

A New Hampshire pilot faces manslaughter charges for a crash in January 2011 that killed his 35-year-old daughter. Steven Fay, 57, of Hillsborough, N.H., will be arraigned Thursday on one count of involuntary manslaughter in connection with the crash of a Cessna 310F twin, which killed Jessica Malin. Fay is accused of "unintentionally and unlawfully" causing Malin's death by means of "wanton or reckless conduct." According to the NTSB's factual [report](#), Fay held a private pilot certificate for ASEL only, with no multiengine rating, although he had logged about 50 hours of multi instruction time. The airplane hit trees on final approach as the pilot was attempting a visual touch-and-go landing, about 90 minutes after sunset, at a small airport in Orange, Mass.



The grand jury's [indictment](#) alleges that Fay's conduct "created a high degree of likelihood that substantial harm would result to another, in that he did operate a Cessna fixed-wing multi-engine aircraft without sufficient training, experience, expertise, licensure, qualifications and/or supervision, and in violation of various rules and regulations of the Federal Aviation Administration." According to Dist. Atty. Steven Gagne, "Mr. Fay was neither licensed nor qualified to fly that twin-engine plane without an instructor on board, and he was repeatedly warned as such, yet he nevertheless chose to fly the plane at night with a passenger on board without his instructor's knowledge or approval." The FAA revoked Fay's pilot certificate last March.

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## NASA App Uses ATC To Teach Math

A new free app from NASA is designed to help kids understand math by solving simulated ATC problems, but developers hope it will also inspire them to pursue a career in aeronautics. "Using an interactive game to spark their interest, while at the same time teaching them fundamental math concepts ... is a perfect way to help cultivate the next generation of engineers and technologists," said Leland Melvin, NASA's associate administrator for education. The "Sector 33" app, which can be downloaded free from Apple's [app store](#), allows the player to work a sector of airspace spanning Nevada and California, adjusting each airplane's path and speed to move as fast as possible while maintaining separation and avoiding thunderstorms.



The [game](#) is designed for students in middle school and above. It's part of the Smart Skies educational software project developed by NASA's Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate with cooperation from the FAA and the National Air Traffic Controllers Association. The app is compatible with the iPad, iPhone, and iPod Touch. An Android version is in the works and will be available soon, NASA said.

## Agile Hawk Inspires UAV Design

Goshawks can fly at top speed through dense forest, and researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are studying the birds to help design unmanned aerial vehicles that will fly at high speeds through city streets and other crowded environments. Emilio Frazzoli, an associate professor of aeronautics and astronautics at MIT, said today's drones fly just fast enough to be able to stop within the field of view of their sensors. "If I can only see up to five meters, I can only go up to a speed that allows me to stop within five meters," Frazzoli says. "Which is not very fast." The trick the goshawk employs is to gauge the density of the forest, and speed past obstacles, knowing intuitively that, given a certain density, it can always find an opening through the trees.

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Frazzoli's research team, which includes mathematicians and biologists, created a model to represent varying densities of trees, and calculated the probability that a bird would collide with a tree while flying at a certain speed. The [team found](#) that, for any given forest density, there exists a critical speed above which there is no "infinite collision-free trajectory." In other words, the bird is sure to crash. Below this speed, a bird has a good chance of flying without incident. "If I fly slower than that critical speed, then there is a fair possibility that I will actually be able to fly forever, always avoiding the trees," Frazzoli says.

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## Super-Heroes Fly Over New York City (With Video)

What appeared to be human forms recently seen flying over New York city made passes along the Brooklyn bridge, flew past the Statue of Liberty, and some even performed loops -- they were also part

of a viral marketing campaign. To promote a movie, three remote-controlled aircraft designed to look like flying people were flown by ground-based operators. The illusion is at least surreal and at most rather convincing. The RC people design is a product marketed by rcsuperhero.com, which offers "full scale RcSuperhero 78-inch show plane plans and kits, as well as hand tossed gliders shaped as flying people."

The RC version has an arm span of 47 inches, stands about 78 inches tall, weighs about 3.3 pounds and costs a few hundred dollars as a kit. It is driven by an electric motor that manages more than five pounds of thrust from a 12-inch propeller. The thrust-to-weight ratio makes vertical performance possible. Basic radio control hardware is required. According to [the designer](#), "Any average RC pilot can fly this." Before the New York, stunt, the pilots practiced at a location on Long Island.

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What You Missed in AVwebBiz This Week

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## FAA Delays UAS Rulemaking

The FAA has further delayed publishing rulemaking on access by unmanned aerial systems (UAS) to the National Airspace System (NAS). The agency announced Monday that a proposed rule that was supposed to be ready by the end of January will instead be published "this spring." The FAA did not say why the rule was delayed. This rule will deal with drones that weigh less than 55 pounds and the delay will affect businesses that have already found numerous uses for the increasingly sophisticated and remarkably affordable devices.



As we [reported](#) Monday, the Los Angeles Police Department warned local realtors to stop hiring the services of companies that will take aerial photos and videos of properties. Just what the LAPD is doing involving itself in airspace-use enforcement is one of the intriguing side issues that is emerging as the FAA grapples with the burgeoning industry. Lawyers and lobbyists are starting to line up and we'll have more on this as it gets even more interesting.

## FAA Medical System To Go Paperless

All applications for medical and student pilot certificates will be filed electronically instead of on paper by Oct. 1, the FAA said last week. In the January issue of the FAA Medical Bulletin ([PDF](#)), Federal Air Surgeon Dr. Fred Tilton said the paper system "allows for too many errors, leads to storage problems, and creates security risks." It also costs the FAA \$150,000 every year to print, store, distribute, and mail Form 8500-8. The electronic [MedXPress](#) system will eliminate those problems and expenses, and will make it possible to offer new services -- for example, Tilton said, pilots and AMEs will be able to track the status of applications online. EAA and AOPA raised concerns about the change.



Pilots who use a public computer at a library or a public wi-fi connection "could potentially compromise the security of medical information," AOPA said. The change also raises questions about how the application might be modified in the future. "The paper document, Form 8500-8, has been subject to approval by the Office of Management and Budget before any changes can be made, and it is not yet clear whether elimination of the paper document will affect that procedure," AOPA said. Sean Elliott, EAA's vice president of industry and regulatory affairs, said EAA's main concern is that a lack of education by the FAA for both pilots and AMEs "will lead to confusion." EAA also wants the FAA to ensure that AMEs who don't do a lot of medical exams each year are familiar with the online process, and to clarify at what point in time the online application becomes "official" and the applicant can no longer withdraw it. Tilton said the FAA will discuss

the changes with pilots at safety meetings, at Sun 'n Fun and AirVenture, and at AME seminars. He also said the FAA plans to transition air traffic controllers to the MedXPress system in the future.

Dr. Brent Blue, a senior AME in Wyoming, told AVweb he's been using MedXPress for all his pilot clients for about a year, and "generally, the system works well." [Click here for a PDF with the full text](#) of Dr. Blue's comments about the pros and cons of the system for pilots and AMEs.

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### Question of the Week: Crash Pilots as Criminals?

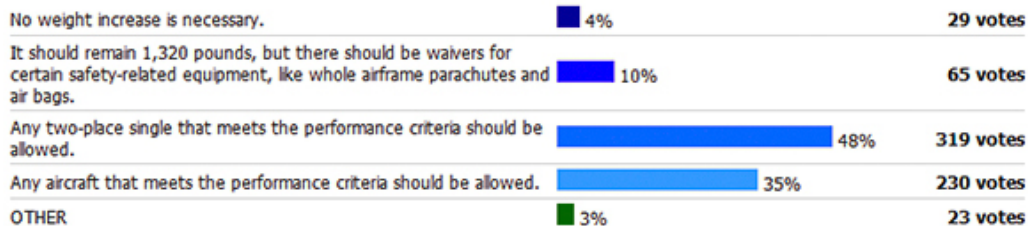
A New Hampshire pilot is facing [manslaughter charges](#) in the death of his daughter after the twin he was flying without a multi-endorsement crashed in Massachusetts.

[Are there circumstances where pilots should face criminal action?](#)

*(click to answer)*

#### Last Week's Question: Results

##### How much should an LSA weigh?



Want to see the current breakdown of responses? [Take a moment to answer the question yourself](#), and then you can view real-time results.

#### What's On Your Mind?

Have an idea for a new "Question of the Week"?  
Send your suggestions to [qotw@avweb.com](mailto:qotw@avweb.com)

**NOTE:** This address is *only* for suggested "QOTW" questions, and *not* for "QOTW" answers or comments. (Use [this form](#) to send "QOTW" comments to our AVmail Editor.)

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Opinion & Commentary

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## AVweb Insider Blog: Three Wishes -- Which Aviation Historical Events Would You Elect to See?

If the genie popped out the bottle and granted you three wishes to witness three events in aviation history, which three would you pick? On the *AVweb Insider* blog, Paul Bertorelli offers his choices. Plus, there's a link to a cool 3-D video.

[Read more and join the conversation.](#)



## AVweb Insider Blog: *Red Tails* -- Not Awful, But Not Great, Either

George Lucas intended *Red Tails* to feel like a movie shot during the 1940s. He got the hokey dialog part right, but at the expense of really telling the story of the Tuskegee Airmen. Still, says Paul Bertorelli on the *AVweb Insider* blog, it's worth a trip to the theater to see.



[Read more and join the conversation.](#)

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AVweb Media: Look, Listen, Laugh and Learn

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## U.S. Sport Aviation Expo 2012: Video Round-Up

Did you miss any of our video coverage of the 2012 U.S. Sport Aviation Expo in Sebring, Florida? We were on hand to kick tires, ask questions, and fly some of this year's most exciting light sport airplanes. Be sure to check out our videos on the FK12 Comet biplane, the Vans RV-12, Flight Design's CTLE light sport police aircraft, the Renegade Falcon LS, Allegro Airplanes, and Corbi's air conditioning system for LSAs.





Your Favorite FBOs

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## FBO of the Week: Franklin Aviation (K1A5, Franklin, North Carolina)

[Nominate an FBO](#) | [Rules](#) | [Tips](#) | [Questions](#) | [Winning FBOs](#)

AVweb's "FBO of the Week" ribbon goes to **Franklin Aviation** at Macon County Airport (K1A5) in Franklin, North Carolina.

AVweb reader **Gerry McCarley** is a regular at 1A5 and vouched for Franklin's top-notch service in his recommendation of the FBO:

*I visit Franklin Aviation several times a year. Their customer care and service are some of the best I have found. On a recent visit (over Christmas) the weather changed, and snow/ice was forecast. Without my asking, Neil and his people found space in their hangar and kept my airplane inside over that night. Their fuel prices are competitive, and with the new extended runway and GPS approach, it's one of the best places to stop.*

**Keep those nominations coming.** For complete contest rules, [click here](#).

AVweb is actively seeking out the best FBOs in the country and another one, submitted by you, will be spotlighted here next Monday!



Names Behind the News

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**Tom Bliss**

Editorial Director, Aviation Publications

**Paul Bertorelli**

Editor-in-Chief

**Russ Niles**

Contributing Editors

**Mary Grady**

**Glenn Pew**

Webmaster

**Scott Simmons**

Contributors

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