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The sky's the limit

Tuesday, October 26, 2010

By Randy M. Cauthron Managing Editor

For Dave Rowland, a silent heart attack, discovered during a routine physical, stole his passion nearly 30 years ago.

Rowland, who lived in Jackson, Minn. and summered at Okoboji since 1993, operated multiple businesses, including a business that together with Rural Connections introduced Internet services to southwest Minnesota and northwest Iowa in 1996.

He began to pursue his passion for flying nearly three decades ago, but the dream of being a private pilot crashed and burned when the heart attack, an incident he never knew took place, forced him to surrender his place in the friendly skies.

"When that happens, the FAA pulls your medical so at the time, I couldn't continue flying," Rowland explained. "Without a medical you just can't fly anymore. Flying just kind of went by the wayside."

FAA had rules prohibiting heart attack victims from flying. They changed those rules a few years ago.

In September 2008, Rowland after undergoing a quintuple bypass heart surgery.

"It was after that, that I decided to look into whether I could ever fly again."

He continued, "We were back here last year about this time, October, and I started thinking about it. I decided to look into it and went through a bunch of medical tests, and submitted the results to the FAA. If they look at them favorably they give you a third class medical. That's the minimum you need to get a private pilots license," Rowland said.

The FAA extended Rowland the third class medical.

"The FAA requires annual cardio tests for me...stress/treadmill/echo cardiogram, in addition to the standard biannual flight physical. I'm approved for this cycle for the next six years," said Rowland.

After receiving the go-ahead from the FAA, he immediately began looking to return to the pilot's seat. Rowland completed ground school online - beginning while in northwest Iowa and finishing the work at his winter home in Napa, Calif. Next, he took the FAA written exam in Santa Rosa, Calif. in November 2009. Soon after, the Midwest native started his flight schooling at an airport located in Napa last December.

"I got about 40 percent of it completed out there. You get a lot of rainy weather in northern California in the winter. There were lots of days we couldn't fly," Rowland said.

When he returned to Iowa for the summer, he continued his training with the air instruction program at Northwest Iowa Regional Airport in Spencer through Leading Edge Aviation. He flew a little bit in June, skipped July to take part in several family events, then resumed flying again in August and September, completing his check flight



Dave Rowland is all smiles after completing his check flight. He shakes the hand of Leading Edge Aviation trainer Paul Cobler after finishing his training last week. (Photo submitted)

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last week to complete his training.

Paul Cobler with Leading Edge Aviation worked with Rowland to complete his training.

"He was a non-traditional student," said Cobler, who was trained through the Iowa Lakes aviation program. "Most of the people that come in and start getting their private pilot license are high school or college age - looking to get into it as a career. Anyone over 40, someone who wants to fly as a hobby, I would call a non-traditional student."

Cobler said that coming in, Rowland displayed basic aerodynamic knowledge, but said there was some time that had lapsed since he last flew. "We pretty much had to start over. He had knowledge, had the determination and he just got it done."

The student was equally complimentary of his younger teacher. "He was a good instructor, a great guy and a hard working young man. I think that the instruction was just excellent, especially in a smaller rural area where you don't run a volume of students through. I was very pleased with it."

One of the challenges Rowland faced was the difference in training aircrafts. He was flying a brand new Cessna in California, and took to the air in a 1978 Piper Warrior in Spencer.

"The airplane in California was brand new with glass cockpit and digital instruments," Rowland detailed. "The one here was about a 1978 with all analog instruments."

He added, "Ironically that was the same type and year that I had started flying 30 years ago."

Rowland is happy to again be able to fly.

"It's a very peaceful thing to do, especially when you're by yourself," Rowland said. He hopes however that he will soon have passengers. His wife has yet to join him in flight, since he wasn't allowed to have a passenger in the plane before receiving his license. He and his wife, Beverly plan to return to Napa on Wednesday of this week. He hopes to take a trip to see his daughter in Seattle, Wash. before returning to the area next summer. Trips to see his other children in Minnesota and Wisconsin are in the works for summer 2011.

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Having lived this past year with my dear hubby, I know how much work it is to become a pilot. As I helped him study, I realized there is A LOT TO LEARN! He was focused and spent HOURS reading/re-reading. If there is anyone out there with a dream, I say Go 4 it!!

We're lucky to have such a nice airport facility with such competent operators/teachers in Spencer.

-- Posted by **luvboji** on Tue, Oct 26, 2010, at 8:53 PM

Re: heart issues,

I can empathize with your dilemma. I have friends who have successfully overcome their heart related deficiencies and received flight approval. When it comes to the brain, and brain injury, the authorities are dealing with a different risk factor. I'm working on it. In the meantime I am pursuing other passions and hope, eventually, to return to #1.

Congratulations to your self.

G.

-- Posted by **Lurch** on Wed, Oct 27, 2010, at 7:32 PM

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