

Thursday, June 21, 2007
Last updated 12:43 a.m. PT

Jamaican-born pilot lives his round-the-world dream
Goal is to inspire American youths

By JESSIE DIMARIANO
P-I REPORTER

Jamaican-born pilot Barrington Irving landed his single-engine plane in Seattle Wednesday, nearly 30 days after he left Miami ... flying east.

Irving, 23, who grew up in Miami's inner city, was just three stops away Wednesday from a goal he hopes will inspire youth across the nation.

With 21 stops in his globe-hopping trip already behind him, he's also about to enter the record books -- the youngest pilot ever to fly around the world and the first circumnavigating solo pilot of African descent.

"I want to utilize my age to speak to youth," said Irving. "It doesn't matter where they are coming from, they can have dreams in aviation."

Having already completed a large portion of his 130-hour "World Flight Adventure," Irving's travels have spanned four continents and included stops in locations ranging from Greece to Egypt to Hong Kong.



Gilbert W. Arias / P-I

Barrington Irving, 23, nearing the end of his solo flight around the world in a single-engine plane, is greeted Wednesday at Boeing Field by Erika Mueller, a representative of Galvin Flying Services.

After several attempts at getting his expedition off the ground -- no one wanted to lend him a plane -- Irving opted to ask aircraft component manufacturing companies to donate parts. From cockpit systems to the engine, Irving acquired \$300,000 in donated components, which were then assembled by Oregon-based aircraft distributor Columbia Aircraft.

During the assembly of his Lancair Columbia 400, Irving founded Experience Aviation Inc., a non-profit organization that gives flight-simulator training and aviation-career guidance to middle school and high school students. Thinking of them, he christened his creatively constructed aircraft "Inspiration."

"They are at an age where they are the most impressionable and have so many options," said Irving of the young students. "This is just another positive option for them to have."

The red, white and blue plane, emblazoned with the insignia of sponsors -- Chevron, Goodyear and many lesser-known companies -- is a testament to the determination Irving has applied to this venture, as well as its costs.

He says he started with \$30 in his pocket. "Now I have \$20."

But he has overcome more than financial hurdles.

In Canada, he was delayed two weeks due to snowstorms and sub-freezing weather. Crossing the North Atlantic, St. John to Azores, the nine-hour leg was undeniably cramped in his composite plane, modified to carry 75 gallons of extra fuel to extend the stock plane's 1,300-mile range.

"For nine hours," he recounted in his blog, "so many things ran through my mind such as family, friends, mentors, sponsors, and, most importantly, flying the aircraft. I can only imagine what Charles Lindbergh went through because he did not have the technology or communication with anyone."

Unlike Lindbergh, Irving's modern aircraft was able to fly above the weather.

"At 11,000 feet I saw storms further north and south of me," he wrote of the Atlantic crossing. "It was as if God cleared a highway for me. This flight was indeed a tremendous challenge but after landing in the beautiful Azores, I felt as if some load was lifted off my shoulders."

All his challenges, and many of his thoughts have been tracked throughout the journey on Irving's Web site, experienceaviation.org, where Microsoft provides GPS tracking of the flight along with satellite telephone and text-messaging to Irving's plane to allow daily updates in his blog.

What's more, a Microsoft flight-simulator program allows aviation students to experience many of the same challenges Irving has. That's important to Irving.

As the name of his plane implies, bringing "inspiration" to those students has been part of Irving's mission from its inception. "I've been able to live out a dream here in the U.S.," he said. "I want to accomplish a point that they can do it, too, and do even better than me."

Irving plans stops in Denver and Houston before returning to Miami. And then there's a book and documentary, he says, sometime in the future.