



## Wings will carry him to his next dream

Harrison, who goes to Sand Creek High School, earned his wings through the Mile High Flight Program, a nonprofit program that works to get black teenagers into the air. (MARK REIS, THE GAZETTE)

*High school senior from Colorado Springs earns his pilot certificate, fulfilling a childhood ambition*

By ANDREA BROWN  
THE GAZETTE  
September 20, 2007 - 9:03AM

Students took notice when Sand Creek High School senior class president Jamar Harrison walked down the hall with flight wings pinned to his shirt.

"People were saying, 'Why are you wearing those plastic wings?'" he recalled. "I said, 'These are my real wings.'"

It's a boyhood dream come true for the 17-year-old honor student.

He recently made his first solo flight at Centennial Airport under the watchful eye of former Tuskegee Airman John Mosley, who flew for the allblack Army Air Corps fighter squadrons in World War II.

The 86-year-old Denver veteran was on hand to observe the Colorado Springs teen test for a pilot certificate.

"He was part of history, and he was watching me make my history," Harrison said. "He said, 'You'll never forget it; it's a moment like no other.'"

Getting more black teenagers into the air is something Mosley's son, Eric, 47, a United Airlines pilot from Aurora, and two Denver-area FedEx pilots have been working on for 10 years. They rely on corporate sponsors and volunteers to run the nonprofit Mile High Flight Program at Centennial Airport.

It is an expansion of a Denver program the elder Mosley ran decades ago to provide minority youths with aviation opportunities.

Eric Mosley said blacks represent less than 1 percent of professional pilots, which he attributes in part to limited exposure.

About 30 young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds are admitted to the program's series of field trips to flight operation centers and academies. Applications are being taken now for the session starting next month and going through spring.

A few participants are chosen for the final pilot training, paying a few hundred dollars for lessons valued at more than \$3,000.

Eric Mosley said Harrison was a natural finalist — “a right fit for the program. He is a very goal-oriented and disciplined person.”

Harrison, the youngest child of a beautician mother and Army veteran father, got hooked on planes as a toddler. He’d craft mock flight plans with toy planes.

“He’d take the phone off the hook and carry it around, pretending like he’s talking to the tower,” said his mother, Lucia. “The airport was like Disney World to him.”

At an early age he’d point to the sky and recite the stats of a plane flying overhead — something he still does. Monday, standing outside his high school in northeast Colorado Springs, he stopped midsentence to describe a distant plane heading toward the airport.

The eight-week pilot training this summer took his passion to a new level, turbulence and all.

During a lesson, he made a mistake on a recovery drill and sent the plane spiraling nose-down.

“The instructor was calm. I was panicking. All I saw was the ground in front of me,” Harrison said. “I was screaming for my mom.”

She said she was glad she wasn’t there to see it.

The incident rattled him for several days, yet braced him for dealing with dangers lurking in the sky.

Harrison said he talked to himself during the 30-minute solo flight in the Cessna 172 to stay focused.

His parents watched from the ground, listening as he radioed the tower.

“To hear him actually do that, we were like, ‘Oh, my. That is him,’” his mother said. “It was like we were up there, too.”

Harrison said that he hopes to find another flight program to get a passenger license, and that he also wants to earn an engineering degree. He said he hasn’t decided if he will fly as a career or a hobby.

The pilot certificate gave him a boost.

“I waited my whole life to get to this point,” he said. “I can go further.”

Aiming high is the flight program’s goal, Eric Mosley said.

“They learn they can succeed anywhere in life — the cockpit, board room or laboratory,” he said. “We view it as a metaphor for life.”