

THE Messenger

Local pilot receives top FFA honor

McCartan has been flying for 52 years



-Messenger photo by Bill Shea

Gary McCartan, center, of Pocahontas, poses with the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award that he was presented Friday morning at Fort Dodge Regional Airport. He is joined by Chris Manthe, left, from the Federal Aviation Administration Safety Team, and his wife, Beth McCartan.

Gary McCartan took his first trip in an airplane when a World War II pilot flew him and his father to an air show in Waterloo.

The next time the Pocahontas man was in a plane, he was at the controls. What followed was 52 years of flawless flying in multiple types of airplanes.

That achievement was recognized Friday morning when he was presented The Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award at Fort Dodge Regional Airport.

The Federal Aviation Administration presents the award to pilots who have flown for at least 50 years with no accidents or rules violations.

Two representatives of the Federal Aviation Administration Safety Team, David Hintz and Chris Manthe, came to Fort Dodge to make the presentation.



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This is The Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award presented to Gary McCartan, of Pocahontas, Friday. The honor is bestowed on pilots who have flown for at least 50 years without an accident or rules violation.

McCartan said he was pleased to receive what he understands to be *“the highest award the FAA gives.”*

He said he first became interested in flight when that neighbor took him and his father to the air show in Waterloo at which the Navy’s Blue Angels performed.

“That was impressive,” he said.

After graduating high school, he went to United Electronics School in West Des Moines, an institution that no longer exists. The school had a flying club, which he joined. The first plane he flew was a two-seat Cessna 150.

McCartan obtained his private pilot certification in 1970. Since then, he has attained every rating for flying single and multi-engine aircraft.

He has flown at least 60 different types of aircraft.

He said his favorite plane to fly is a Super Cub that has floats so that it can land on water. He said his favorite fishing trips involve flying that plane to a lake and landing on the lake. After landing, he starts an outboard motor attached to one of the floats and cruises around the lake.

McCartan has attended every Experimental Aircraft Association gathering in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, since 1983. There, he attends as many classes as he can each day.

His wife, Beth McCartan, and son, Aaron McCartan, are also pilots.

“He set a very good example for anyone interested in aviation,” Aaron McCartan said.

“He’s always taken the steps to learn anything he could,” he added.

He said his father never compromises on maintenance or training.

The award presentation was a surprise. Gary McCartan was lured to the airport with the understanding that he and his wife would meet a few friends there and then go to lunch in Fort Dodge. He realized that there

was a little bit more than lunch involved when he came to the front door of the terminal and saw about 20 people waiting for him.

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