

Children do matter at Stuart Jet Center

By R.J. Harrington

Thursday, July 17, 2008



About 50 students from Indiantown YMCA, ages 5 to 13, tour the control tower at Stuart Jet Center at Witham Field in Stuart on Wednesday. The kids also got to tour the LifeStar rescue helicopter and board an aircraft. This was a part of a program called "Why You Matter," a summer program that invites local professionals with interesting jobs to donate their time and resources to teach the kids about compelling and attainable career possibilities.

STUART — Seen through the eyes of YMCA summer campers from Indiantown, the Stuart Jet Center was a wonderland on Wednesday.

There was plenty of excited chatter when some 50 children ages 5-13 squeezed inside a control tower. But as soon as an approaching plane called the tower and the counselors called out "hush," it was as quiet as a church.

Air traffic controller Forrest Fenton, a retired Air Force officer, explained the use of the bewildering array of radar, consoles and microphones as the children crowded in close.

He showed them a light gun, used to signal planes in the air or on the runway.

"I'd better not let you handle this," he said, "because if you break it, someone has to come up with \$5,000."

The summer program is called "Why You Matter." It aims to excite Indiantown kids about the potential they possess by inviting area professionals with interesting jobs to donate their time and resources to teach the campers about compelling and attainable career possibilities.

"Aviation still fascinates adults, so it really captivates the kids," said Shawn Keil, executive director of the Indiantown YMCA.

"For the Stuart Jet Center to give our students a behind-the-scenes look at such a cool line of work is a great investment in the future of Indiantown. Opportunities like this really inspire the kids to dream big dreams," Keil said.

Jesmarie Rivera, 13, an eighth-grade student at Indiantown Middle School, said she learned a lot. "Now I know how planes can take off and land.

"At first, I was scared to come up into the tower — it's so high up here. But it's fun," she said.

Air traffic controller Al Shafer said they should have visited Tuesday when there was an emergency landing of Delta flight 5481. The Miami-bound plane was forced to land at Witham Field when, after circling several airports during a storm, its fuel supply became dangerously low.

Rivera said she was learning a lot at camp, especially from visits to other businesses.

Camp Director Cindy Maisonneuse said the campers had also visited Kennedy Space Center and the Museum of Science and Discovery in Fort Lauderdale.

Eight-year-old Giselle Delgado, a visitor from New York, summed up the experience by saying "It's cool."

