



Welaka Christmas Parade Saturday at noon



COURIER JOURNAL

The Voice of South Putnam

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New fire chief for Crescent City See 'It's Your Turn' on page B1

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News Briefs

City Commission meets

The regular meeting of Crescent City Board of Commissioners will be held on Monday, Dec. 11. The agenda includes a final reading of Ordinance 06-17, Annexation of 8 acres south of Crescent for Villas of Crescent. A new business, the commissioners will consider a request to ask for bids for government software and hardware, and they will hear a report regarding the 2007. The meeting begins at 7 p.m. and is held at city hall.

Food will be collected Saturday

By South Troop 42 will be collecting bags of non-perishable food items for the annual food drive this Saturday, Dec. 16, starting at 11 a.m. All donated items will benefit South Putnam Christian Center. Look for the list in your neighborhood to give generously.

Courier Journal

Albatross from pg. A1

Albatross on the wing

Cherry Palmer Contributor

Built as a war machine by the U. S. government in 1951, the Grumman HU-16B/ASW Albatross boasts a 96.8 foot wingspan, maximum weight capacity of 33,453 pounds and speeds of 235 mph. With its two propellers driven by 1,425-horsepower engines, the plane stands 25 feet 10 inches in height and can land in ocean waters with up to five-foot seas.

John and Julie Fetcko own and pilot one of about a dozen such machines still in service. As a search and rescue plane used during the Korean War, the Albatross saved the lives of more than 1,000 United Nations personnel stranded in enemy waters. The Fetcko's plane has been converted into their

personal motor home.

The Fetcko's Albatross can reach 170 knots in the air (195 mph) and about 80 knots on water. The plane needs a minimum of three feet of water in which to land because of the draft. According to Julie, "When the aircraft lands on water, a minimum of one mile is preferred. Although the aircraft lands in a shorter distance, the take off on water has increased drag because of the hull, therefore, demanding more length."

Except for three to four months out of the year, the Fetcko's make their home at Eagles Nest Aerodrome and Seaplane Base, which is located on Highway 308 between Crescent City and Fruitland. Approximately 25 years ago, David Garber, a Pan American seaplane captain, developed the initial airplane landing site for him and his Pan

Am friends.

Eagles Nest Aerodrome, licensed by the FAA and the DOT, covers approximately 100 acres of privately owned land, which is managed by the Eagles Nest Homeowner's Association. Of the 24 landowners, 15 homes exist and each has airplane hangars. Situated on 20-foot deep Lake Estelle, Julie says, "It's unique because it has both a license seaplane base and a grass runway."

When asked about her first interest in flying, Julie recalls being nine years old and winning a contest. She was one of twelve children and the daughter of a Baptist minister, who also worked as a surveyor in order to support his large family. The contest involved memorizing Bible scriptures

See Albatross on page A8



The above Albatross, flown by John and Julie Fetcko out of the Eagle's Nest Aerodrome and Seaplane Base, is one of about a dozen such planes still in service. These planes were once used for search and rescue during the Korean War. In the inset photo, John and Julie Fetcko smile from the cockpit doorway of their Grumman Albatross. (photo by Cherry Palmer)

with the winner receiving a airplane ride. Julie won; however, "the gentleman who promised the ride had disas-

sembled his plane and wasn't able to fulfill the obligation." Nevertheless, Julie's father "saved enough money to buy

me a ride in a small airplane with an instructor."

The Fetckos married in 1977, and John wanted to be a pilot. They owned an engineering and manufacturing company in Gainesville, Georgia. As the business prospered, the couple became financially

able for John to obtain his pilot's license in 1987. In 1991, Julie was able to secure her initial pilot's license.

Today, only four women in the world are rated to fly the albatross. Julie was the third woman to receive the albatross rating, which she got in

1998. John has the same rating in addition to having his instrument rating.

The couple leaves Eagles Nest in mid-June each year and returns the first part of October. Julie says, "John manages the air show schedule through the Internet. He

determines our travel direction and schedule through the summer months." For example, "In 2005, we flew the airplane up through north Michigan, then out through the Washington state area, where we participated in the Tri-City Water Follies," explains Julie.

The tri-city area involves: Pasco, Richland, and Kennewick along the Columbia River, which have held the unlimited hydroplane (boat) races since 1996, a/k/a the Budweiser Columbia Cup. In 2005, both Julie and John "performed the intermission show with touch and goes," which was the first time for a seaplane to land in the Columbia River for this event.

Last year, the Fetckos spent their summer months attending air shows in Indiana, northern Michigan, upstate New York, Maine and Canada. Julie is currently commuting to Lake Wales to assist a developer in planning a fly-in park. The same developer has had his sites set on a future fly-in facility in Costa Rica. Perhaps only the Albatross knows where it will fly next.

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