

Local & State

Seaplane

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Splash-In at Lake Parker

Built in the United States for use in submarine warfare, the Albatross was shipped to Norway as part of a NATO exchange and eventually made its way to Chile, the Fetckos said.

"The couple bought the plane, valued at about \$500,000, three years ago from the man who flew the famous seaplane for the credits of 'Fantasy Island.'"

(Yes, that "the plane, the plane.")

The interior of the Albatross holds seats for 12 people.

But the Fetckos plan to remove them so they can install a modern refrigerator, stereo equipment and a galley.

John Fetcko is an inventor and a mechanical engineer who has made a lucrative living dreaming up adhesives and nonwoven fibers, some of which made their way into baby diapers.

The couple recently sold their business, based on Fetcko's inventions, and are semi-retired.

"We want to fly and enjoy it while we have our health," she said.

Their small dog, Wiggon, named for another Grumman seaplane, travels with them.

"He's our mascot," Julie Fetcko said.

The couple have no children.

Both Fetckos are pilots — John for 12 years, Julie for eight. And they fly the plane together.

Government regulations require two pilots for any plane that weighs more than 1,250 pounds.

"We both have our jobs to do," John Fetcko said. "One flies, the other looks after the engines and things like that. We call them pilot duties and the nonpilot duties."

Both said the Albatross flies well.

Julie Fetcko said it's easier to handle than any of the smaller planes she's flown.

"It's so heavy," she said. "You always know what it's going to do."

The down side of that is gas mileage.

The Albatross holds 1,000 gallons, but burns 110 gallons per hour while flying.

"It costs us a fortune, but we enjoy it," Julie Fetcko said.

The biggest difference between landing a plane on water and on a traditional runway is the unpredictability of marine conditions and the wide space for touchdown.

"Water's always changing," John Fetcko said. "There's rough water, smooth water."

He said Lake Mead provided the worst water conditions in which the Fetckos have landed.

"There were 35-knot winds and 4-foot waves, whitecaps," he said.

The Albatross came through fine.

"It just felt like a boat moving through real rough water," he said.

And there are benefits to water landings.

"When there's a runway, it's a narrow strip that you have to hit," John Fetcko said. "I can land out here on the lake almost anywhere as long as I'm pointed into the wind."

And once landed, the Fetckos know, the Albatross can make quite a houseboat.

Young Pilot and Dot-Com Whiz Is Aiming High for Success

By RICK ROUSOS

The Ledger

MOST 16-year-olds spend their time begging for the car keys. Jamail Larkins goes for the controls of something a little more flashy.

Larkins, a pilot from Augusta, Ga., flies a lot.

When he isn't flying, getting straight A's in high school or acting as a spokesman for the EAA Young Eagles, he runs his own business, Larkins Enterprises.

He sells flight training books and videos, and other merchandise from his Web site (www.Jamail-Larkins.com).

To top it off, Larkins is modest,
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DAVID MILLS/Ledger photos

John and Julie Fetcko sit in the cockpit of their 1951 Grumman HU-16 Albatross at Thursday's Splash-In.



John and Julie Fetcko, who live near Crescent City, leave the Splash-In at Lake Parker in Lakeland in their seaplane.



Doi Malingri of Italy maneuvers his Flying Inflatable Boat above Lake Parker Park on Thursday at the Splash-In.

Couple Plan To Travel In 'Flying Yacht'

By BILLY TOWNSEND

The Ledger

LAKELAND — When John and Julie Fetcko say they have a summer house on a lake, they mean it.

Literally.

Built in 1951, their Grumman HU-16 Albatross seaplane once hunted submarines in the U.S., Norwegian and Chilean militaries.

Now, as a sort of super airborne Winnebago, it seeks — and lands upon — vacation spots.

Last year, it was Maine — the year before, Lake Mead in Arizona.

This year, wherever they go, the Fetckos plan to stay in the belly of their Albatross.

"We're converting it into a flying yacht so we can fly it around instead of buying a summer home," said Julie Fetcko, who splits piloting duties with her husband.

The Fetckos, both 40, flew the Albatross to Lakeland's Sun 'n Fun Fly-In from their actual home at a pilot's enclave near Crescent City in North Florida.

With a wingspan of 98 feet 6 inches, the Albatross loomed over about three dozen other seaplanes Thursday at the
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