

## **Jacksonville's ACE Academy**

With the temperature already passing 85 degrees on a Monday morning, OBAP kicked off its inaugural Jacksonville ACE Academy, with 12 eager but bewildered students. Though they were aware that they were attending a program intended to augment the aviation magnet program that already existed as part of Ribault High School's Marine Corp Junior ROTC (MCJROTC) curriculum, they had no idea what to expect. The instructors were not traditional teachers and there was very little classroom instruction involved in the program.

The Jacksonville ACE Academy was conceived, organized and executed, through collaborations with local organizations with national footprints. OBAP in its title sponsor role, partnered with Ribault HS, Jacksonville Airport Authority (JAA), Jacksonville University (JU), Florida Community College of Jacksonville (FCCJ) and the Florida Air National Guard (FANG). The intent, to give the students an unprecedented window into aviation as it relates to Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) concepts.

Day one was a purely conceptual in nature. Utilizing visual and virtual aides, the students were introduced to aviation concepts, careers and how the world of aviation relates to their everyday lives. Students learned how to fly desktop flight simulators, control airplanes on Virtual Air Traffic Control simulators and comprehend the fundamentals of aerodynamics & power-plants.

On day two, students and OBAP instructors alike scaled the MCJROTC 50' rappelling tower, to eventually take a "leap of faith" on the zip line. Later that day FCCJ opened the doors of their state-of-the-art facilities to give the students a taste of what the future could hold for them. Desktop simulators and whiteboard drawings of how the highways of the sky operate gave way to King Air 200 simulators and tours of FCCJ's ATC training simulator. The Army National Guard and the Coast Guard's Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON) got in on the action by providing the students "hands on" tours of their multi-million dollar helicopters.

JAA and the FANG put their toys on display when they hosted day three. Students toured every corner of Jacksonville International Airport. A stop by the tenant fire station yielded the opportunity for students to operate the water cannons on the fire trucks used to combat fires on the airfield. The FANG offered tours of America's current air superiority fighter, the F-15 Eagle, and the C-130 tactical airlifter assigned to support the wing. The FANG also allowed the students to tour the life support flight that is responsible for supporting the pilots and the Amory where they got to handle a number of weapons used to defend the wing and its assets.

JAA shared day four with JU as the students operated aircraft for the first time on their orientation flight and toured Craig Airport, the busiest operation in JAA's system. JU provided the airplanes and instructors to give the students a glimpse of what it means to "soar like and eagle." As the students took their turns at the controls, those that weren't flying had the opportunity to tour Craig's ATC tower and listen as their classmates interacted with controllers as they exited and returned to the pattern. After a hearty lunch sponsored by JAA, the students then got to tour the Sheriff's Aviation Detachment and "Mosquito Control," where the airplanes used to spray insecticide for insect control are housed.

Without a doubt the inaugural ACE Academy was great success. At the end of activities each day, parents that came to pick up their children repeatedly expressed their gratitude to OBAP and what the organization's program had brought to the lives of their families and the community. The success of the program can also be measured by the fact that every partner that hosted an activity has requested to be part of the program next year in an expanded capacity.

OBAP would like to extend a special thanks to JAA, JU, FCCJ, the FANG and Ribault HS. Without the contributions that each of these organizations provided, the Academy would not have been a success.

If you would like to see what the Jacksonville ACE Academy was like for the students, please visit our link at [www.obap.org](http://www.obap.org) to see the pictures as well as the news coverage the Academy received from the local television station.

