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## Small-plane enthusiasts' message: Lighten up

They show their way to travel at light aircraft fair

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This Fourth of July weekend, Vietnam veteran Donald Dagenhart celebrated the freedom he once feared he'd never experience -- flying.

For most of his life, Dagenhart dreamed of soaring above the ground in a plane, but after being injured during the Vietnam War, both his legs were eventually amputated.

He spent more than a year searching for the right aircraft -- one that could be adapted to fly with hand controls instead of foot bars -- before he actually soared above the ground on his powered parachute last year.

"It's feeling a freedom you just wouldn't believe," said Dagenhart, 52, getting around in his wheelchair during the Light Aircraft Flyers Association's seventh annual Air Fair at Homestead General Aviation Airport.

On Saturday, Dagenhart was one of about a dozen small-plane enthusiasts showing off their toys: light aircraft and ultralight planes that weigh less than about 250 pounds and hold only about five gallons of gasoline.

During the show, instructors offered demonstrations on the light aircraft.

Curious watchers sailed over farmland and airport runways.

"You're up there feeling the wind coming and going," said John Stroud, one of the takers. "I usually see all these farms from the land, they look different from the sky."

That change of scenery was one of the reasons veteran airline pilot Bob Musgrove decided to switch from flying commercial planes to light aircraft.

"I'd been flying for so many years at 39,000 feet that I wanted to get down and be able to wave at people on the ground," said Musgrove, 69 and vice president of the association.

"I wanted to smell the orange blossoms, I wanted to fly near the birds," Musgrove said.

Flying an ultralight plane does not require a pilot's license, according to the Federal Aviation Administration, but two-seater aircraft do require an instructor's license.

After Dagenhart found his aircraft and customized it to fit his disability, he became an instructor and began offering lessons to other disabled aspiring fliers.

"Your handicap is up here," Musgrove said, pointing to his head.

"Not down here," he said, signaling at his amputated left leg and prosthetic right one.

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