

# Young cancer patients fly high

By **KIRK BARRON**

Staff Writer

Batman cruised around Chico Municipal Airport in his Batmobile Saturday morning, greeting people with a cheerful smile and an enthusiastic, "Hi, my name's Bubba, I'm Batman."

Batman, whose real identity is 7-year-old Ryan Gadberry, was at Northgate Aviation for Enloe's Recreation and Dreams for the Children With Cancer free airplane ride event.

Ryan's 10-year-old brother Keith Gadberry and grandmother Karen Flaming were among about 20 families attending.

Ryan has leukemia and has to use a walker — he calls it his Batmobile. When he climbed into Dave Donally's airplane, Ryan made sure to "turn off" his

# FLY

From 1A

Batmobile before leaving it on the tarmac.

Five pilots volunteered their planes and time to fly the families above Chico.

Though Ryan and his family never actually made it into the sky, the pilots stayed busy from 8 a.m. until noon giving rides to the smiling children and some parents.

Daniel Romero, 10, flew with his brother Christopher and his father Chris in pilot Dan Jay's airplane.

It wasn't the first time Daniel had been in a plane, but it was the first time he'd been in a small one.

Jay let Daniel take the rudder for about 15 minutes and the aspiring marine biologist flew above his house and over his friend's house.

Then they hit a little man-made turbulence.

"I started rocking the plane up and down," Daniel said with a mischievous laugh. "I got on the headset and said, 'We are about to experience a little turbulence.'"

Daniel's father Chris said the event was special because it allows families dealing with cancer to come together. Daniel was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia last year.

"For us you just close yourself in to how he feels," Chris said. "It is good to go out as a family and be with people who have been through what we've gone through."

The RAD program is designed to provide a fun place for families to come and be together, said RAD coordinator Joy Todd.

"At these events we try not to talk about cancer; we try to fill up the fun meter," she said.

Cancer can create problems within a family because of all the attention that must be given to the patient, Todd said.

"Kids with cancer have to be going out of town a lot to UC Davis and the Bay Area to get treatment," Todd said. "All the travel really is fragmenting the family."

For 12-year-old Bridget Hurd, having her mother and sister at the event gave her the courage to get on a small airplane. While her mother stayed on the ground, Bridget's twin



Photos by Kirk Barron/Enterprise-Record

**ABOVE: Dave Donally helps Ryan Gadberry out of his plane. RIGHT: Bridget Hurd points to the Sacramento River in Tom Newlander's Beechcraft.**

sister Brittany joined her in the air.

Pilot Tom Newlander took the two west. They flew over Hamilton City and Orland before doing a loop over Black Butte Lake.

Newlander described what he was doing throughout the flight and pointed out landmarks to the sisters.

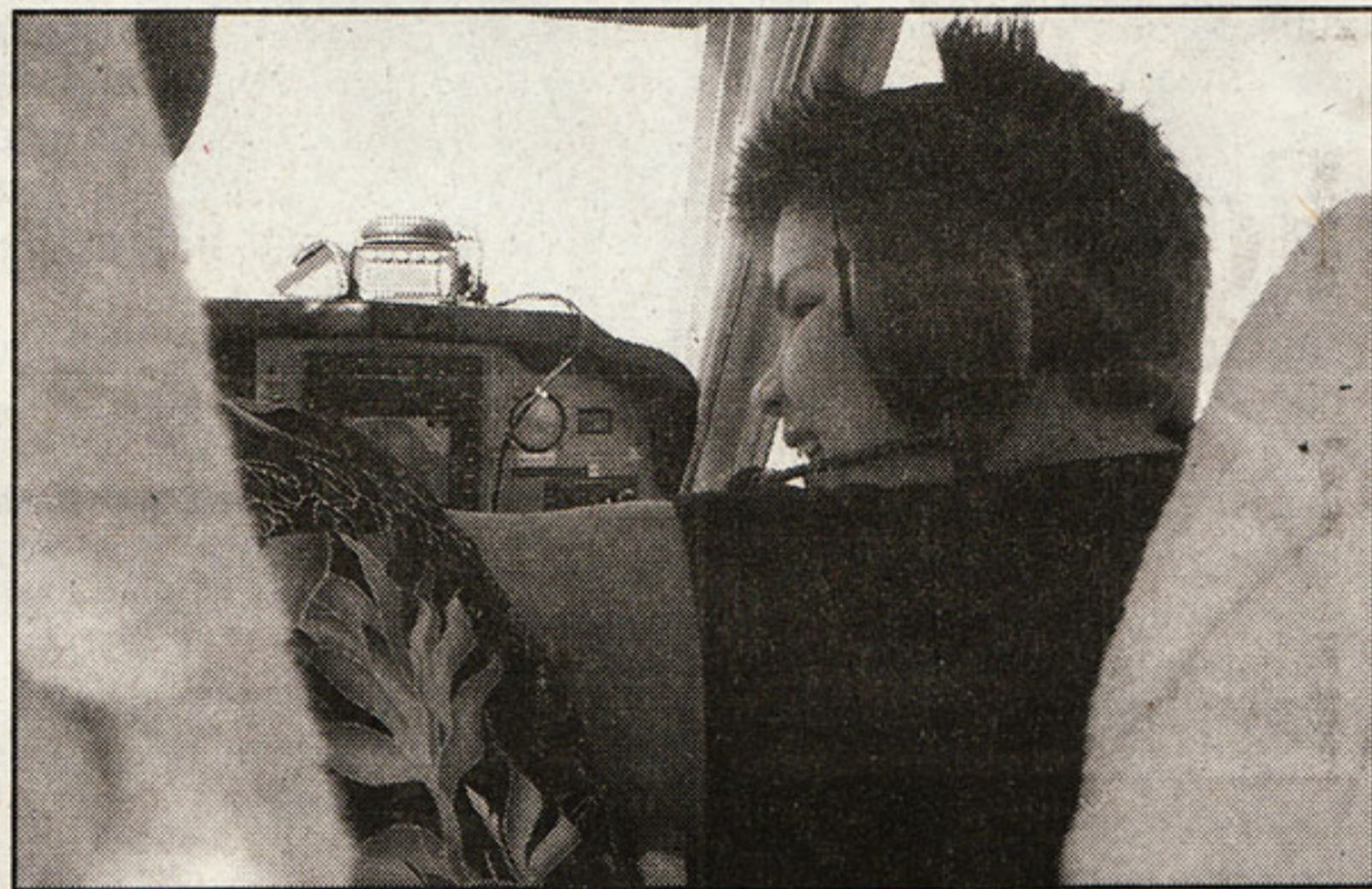
Before the flight, Bridget was "way" nervous, but once she was in the air it wasn't so bad, she said, even when there was some turbulence. It's just wind, she said.

In the air, Newlander told Bridget when they were coming up on a landmark and had her point it out when she saw it. That kept her from thinking too much, she said.

After Newlander smoothly landed his rare Beechcraft Bonanza, the twins were greeted by their mother as they climbed out of the plane.

Northgate Aviation provided the venue and fuel for the airplanes. Owners Maria and Chris Rock were contacted by Debra Turley of A Star For The Night, a nationally syndicated radio show, and decided to host the event. Turley and Maria Rock organized the event.

"We're here to support the community. We want the chil-



dren to come out here and enjoy aviation," Rock said. Northgate Aviation is a new company, opening its doors in October.

Airport Bar & Grill provided breakfast and Staff Sgt. Jon Simmons of the U.S. Army National Guard brought a M998 Humvee from the Chico Armory and gave rides to the families.

The Chico Airport Fire Department brought out its new engine and showed off the several different ways it can spray water.

Ryan "Batman" Gadberry had been inviting people to ride on his fire engine before the lime-green engine arrived.

"That isn't my fire engine; mine is red," Ryan said, then ran off in his Batmobile.

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