

GIRLS CAN REACH FOR THE SKY

Earhart's group hosts Scouts at museum of flight

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It was 90 years ago that Amelia Earhart joined a group of 99 female pilots on Long Island to race across the world.

On Saturday, 30 Girl Scouts followed in their footsteps, hoping to be the next great pioneers in aviation.

Girl Scouts from various troops on Long Island gathered at the Cradle of Aviation museum in Garden City to commemorate the 90th anniversary of Earhart's group, "The Ninety-Nines," which first gathered at Curtiss Field in Valley Stream on Nov. 2, 1929.

The group now has chapters all over the world to encourage and educate young women to pursue careers in the aviation industry.

"It was the beginning of us," said Nancy Neumann, chairwoman of the Long Island and New York/New Jersey chapter of The Ninety-Nines. "A bunch of girls said they should get together and 99 licensed pilots showed up. This is a blending and opportunity to show this isn't just a man's world, but a lot of young girls probably didn't look at it as a career."

The Scouts took part in a series of classes and exhibits at the museum Saturday, learning about navigating and flying in weather, what makes an airplane fly, airplane controls and how to read flight sectional charts.

Girls are also learning about career opportunities not just in piloting planes, but also in aviation engineering and other technical fields.

Organizers with The Ninety-Nines are hoping they can attract more young women into flight to address a nationwide pilot shortage. Federal law requires commercial pilots to have 1,500 hours of flight time, which can be too expensive for some aspiring aviators, said Bev Weintraub, secretary of the New York chapter.

The group's mission is to enhance aviation education and



Above, Faith Gelfund, 11, left, of Oceanside, and Sofia Emru, 10, of Levittown get a cockpit tour from Denise Waters of the Ninety-Nines female pilot organization. Left, Samantha Vacchiano, 12, of Elmont, listens to Lt. Col. Jacqui Sturgess.

"I've always been interested in these large machines that can take me places," Pignataro said.

Corbi Bulluck, the international vice president of The Ninety-Nines, said pilots like Earhart wanted to participate in air races in California, but men said they were not strong enough to fly. Bulluck, 61, of North Carolina, won this year's Air Race Classic, an all-women's airplane race from Tennessee to Ontario, Canada.

"By standing together, they opened the doors to race and have a network to find jobs," Bulluck said. "Women weren't supposed to be pilots, but of the 117 licensed female pilots, 99 women came together and started this whole thing. We need leaders in the cockpit."

offer training programs such as military flying, aviation colleges and \$5 million in scholarships. The chapter also offers airplane rides and allows girls to fly for the first time.

"Flying an airplane is a whole lot of fun. It's not something girls

may be socialized to think of," Weintraub said. "The airplane doesn't know your gender. You may not think you can do it if it's not on your radar screen, and mentoring and experience helps."

Leanna Pignataro, 15, of

Freeport, was with her Girl Scout troop learning about airplane exhibits Saturday. She said she wants to pursue a career in aviation, whether it's as a pilot, engineer or air traffic controller.

"I'm not sure what kick-started my interest in flying, but