

Mt. SAC to celebrate quarter- century of its flight school

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WALNUT >> College Aviation, Mt. San Antonio College's flight school operating out Brackett Field in La Verne, will celebrate its 25th anniversary with a Fly-In on Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the college's hangar at Brackett Field. This event is open to the public.

"We're still one of only three colleges in California that operate their own flight school," said aeronautics and transportation co-chair Robert Rogus.

Alumni, current students, college pilots, instructors, staff, and friends of the flight program are being encouraged to fly-in or drive-in for the anniversary that will be held at Mt. SAC's James T. Clarke Hangar located at the north end of Brackett Field, according to a college news release.

"It really is a celebration of training our own pilots for the last 25 years," said Rogus.

Open seven days a week, the school provides students with the opportunity to earn their pilot's license at roughly a 15 to 20 percent discount compared to most local private flight schools. On average, it takes College Aviation students 65 hours of training to earn their license. Students pay \$35 an hour for flight instruction and between \$75 and \$120 to rent the aircraft. The total cost for a first license is approximately \$10,000—a relative bargain for the cost-conscious student.

And while College Aviation is a special offering among California's colleges, airplanes have been a part of Mt. SAC since the beginning.

"Aviation was here since the first day the college opened," said Rogus.

Airplanes used to take off from and land on what is now Bonita Drive on the eastern end of campus, and the first of the college's aircraft was purchased by the Pomona Chamber of Commerce in the late 1940s.

"Before College Aviation was established, Mt. SAC's airplanes were a private company's flight line," said Rogus.

Fast forward to 25 years ago when aeronautics chair Wayne Lutz had an idea. Lutz spearheaded the move to establish the College Aviation flight school facility at Brackett. The program grew and soon after Mt. SAC's airframe and powerplant program also established a base at Brackett when in 1991 the Clarke Hangar, named after philanthropist Sophia Clarke's son, was dedicated.

In 2006, College Aviation, which resided on the south end of Brackett, moved to the Clarke facility where it is today.

Today, Mt. SAC's aviation program has six aircraft—five Cessna airplanes and a Piper Arrow. There are 250 students enrolled in commercial pilot courses, 250 students enrolled in air traffic control classes, and 50 students enrolled in the flight school. But according to Rogus, there could be more.

“We are turning away 30 to 40 percent of the students who apply to our program,” he said.

In the future, College Aviation should purchase another Cessna 172 to accommodate increased demand and a multi-engine aircraft to round out the training offered, he said.