

TIM CABLE/WJHL CHANNEL 11

Air Force Junior ROTC instructor Col. Bill Powley, center, is shown with Heath Ryans, left, and Aaron Peters. The two Sullivan South students sailed through their solos in a Cessna 152, which earned Powley his 100 and 101 solos.

Sights set high

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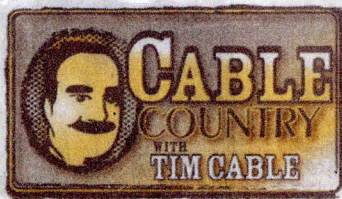
Two South students are 100th and 101st solo flights for Col. Bill Powley

The best he can figure, in the last 20 years, Col. Bill Powley has spent almost as much time in the air than on the ground. The Air Force Junior ROTC instructor first got his flight orientation program off the ground in 1992 at Unicoi County, Tenn., High School. After several successful years there, he took off for Sullivan South High School, where the program is still a high flying success. Recently, Powley soared past a couple of major milestones.

"We've now flown over 5,000 students from around the region," Powley said. "The other big milestone is that I just had my 100th and 101st solos."

The centennial set of South solo students are juniors, Aaron Peters and Heath Ryans.

"What's really neat about Aaron and Heath is that they have gone through the program step by step together," Powley said. "They've been side by



side throughout the whole process and then they soloed on the very same day. That's very unusual for it to work out the way it did for them."

Peters and Ryans earned their wings by acing the required set of nine flight lessons in the orientation program.

"It's a building block approach," Powley said. "We progress as quickly as they show me in the airplane that they can handle what we're doing. Really, learning to fly a Cessna 152 airplane is kind of like riding a bicycle. At first, you can't seem to balance it or anything and then, once you get your balance, it's there and you got it."

Since I'm a big fan of flying, it was a real treat for me to be on hand and watch Peters and Ryans sail through their solos. They handled their two touch and go's and full stop flawlessly.

Then, back on solid ground, they talked about the sky high feeling of confidence their accomplishment gave them.

"It's unlike any other feeling," Peters said. "Flying itself is the greatest feeling on earth I think but flying solo makes me feel really proud. Now I feel like I can accomplish anything I set out to do in life. Maybe even conquer Everest if I wanted to."

"It's absolutely amazing," Ryans said. "Flying an airplane is something I've always wanted to do and I feel pretty great now that I did it."

With 101 solos now in his student flight book, Col. Powley says he expects the program to soar to even greater heights.

"In 2010, we won the award as the top aerospace science program in the nation," Powley bragged. "So, that gave us an even bigger shot in the arm. For a 16- or 17-year-old student, flying an airplane is something they'll never forget. It's truly a great adventure."

Cable Country is on each Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:20 p.m. on WJHL 11 Connects. Tim Cable welcomes story ideas and can be reached at (423) 434-4545 or tcable@11connects.com