

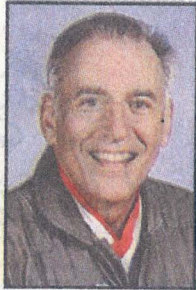
South instructor flying high as Aerospace Teacher of the Year

■ **Bill Powley** was nominated by a former student who is now a captain in the Air Force.

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KINGSPORT — Sullivan South High School Air Force JROTC instructor Bill Powley has made it possible for thousands of area high school students to fly.

Many took their first flight with



POWLEY

not more, haven't been in a plane before," Powley said of the 4,100

him, and the flight program he oversees sometimes is a start to a career as a pilot or a prelude to a military career.

"At least half of them (students), if

who have flown in the Flight Foundation program, which uses rented planes that usually fly out of Tri-Cities Regional Airport or airports in Greeneville and Elizabethton. "Every one of them makes a journal entry for me."

Next month, the retired Air Force fighter pilot's 20 years as a high school educator and flight instructor will be recognized when he receives the A. Scott Crossfield Aerospace Education Teacher of the Year Award, started by name-

sake Crossfield, who died in 2006. The World War II Navy fighter pilot in 1953 became the first man to fly at twice the speed of sound. He also flew the experimental North America X-15 that could have gone into space.

Powley will receive two seats at the National Aviation Hall of Fame President's Reception and Dinner, where he will be awarded \$1,500.

Powley learned of the award

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last week when his wife called him in West Virginia, where he took four South students to a summer leadership camp.

The annual award, dating back to 1986, usually goes to science teachers. Powley has been a JROTC instructor at South for eight years, since the 2002-03 school year. Before that, he spent 11 years at Unicoi County High School. Powley, once a South tennis coach, and Don Shawver are the JROTC instructors at South.

"They are very professional go-getters. They have their kids involved," South Principal Greg Harvey said of the two.

"It (flying) is his passion. You can see," Harvey said of Powley. "He just brings a lot of energy and professionalism to the program and the school."

Powley was a fighter pilot who flew the F-4, A-7 and F-16. He served in the Air Force for 23½ years. He went to the Air Force Academy from 1963 to 1967 and entered the Air Force as a second lieutenant. He retired in 1991 as a lieutenant colonel.

Powley is a native of Baltimore but came to the Tri-Cities with his wife after retirement to try to get a job flying with one of the airlines.

However, that didn't pan out, and he heard about a JROTC position open at Unicoi County High School, where in his interview he said he had recently become a certified flight instructor.

In April 1992, the Unicoi County Board of Education voted 4-3 to allow a flying program at the school, and Powley made the first flight in May 1992.

He said that split BOE vote shows how one person can make a difference.

In the early years at Unicoi, Powley said Jerry O'Conner of Kingsport, owner of Impact Plastics in Erwin, helped with sponsorship money, as did Nuclear Fuel Services and the selling of aerial photographs from some of the flights.

NASA also gave \$10,000 in seed money after Powley called about it three times in 18 months, and the Tennessee Aeronautical Commission later starting giving \$10,000 a year to the Flight Foundation, a non-profit 501C.

The foundation over the years has raised \$350,000.

Powley, who lives in Unicoi with his wife, in 2002-03 moved to an open position at South, where John Dixon was principal.

"They essentially wanted me to come there to begin a flying program," Powley said.

Over the years, Powley and other pilots have taken 4,100 students from 12 schools in East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia on flights. Of those, 85 went on to solo, and five got their private pilot's license while still in high school.

The program serves JROTC student in all branches of the armed services including Sullivan North and East high schools, as well as Doby's-Bennett High in Kingsport, Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett in Washington County, Cherokee and Volunteer highs in Hawkins County, and Lee County, Va., students.

Of 800 students who flew in the 2009-10 year, Powley was on about 600 of those flights.

Seth Bennett, Powley's first solo student at Unicoi High, nominated Powley for the award. Bennett, who was squadron leader while at Unicoi, is a captain in the Air Force and serves as an electrical engineer.

At least four of his former students went on to Middle Tennessee State University to professional pilot school, including Amanda Rice Clark, who got her flight instructor's certification and returned to Unicoi to be the instructor for solo flights there.

From South, David Whitney finished professional pilot school at MTSU, A.J. Vines and Jeremy Shuler are in the program there, and Levi Shanks is to begin the program there this fall.

"This just shows good things can happen if you live long enough," Powley said.

He turns 65 in October but plans to stay in his South job and said that even after retirement from that he hopes to continue taking JROTC students on flights.

"I plan to fly as long as I'm healthy," Powley said. "If I retire, my hobby will probably be flying kids as long as they (sponsors) keep giving me money" for the program.