



SimplyFLY – Illinois SBDC at Elgin Community College



Dave Spano has been flying since he was 18 years old. Now, over 30 years later, he's teaching others how to fly. Back in 2011, with only one plane, he started a flight school to educate and train individuals who wanted to enjoy the sport of flying as much as he did. In 2013, he acquired his second plane. With a serious intent to grow the business, Tony Sabos, a former customer, joined SimplyFLY as a partner in early 2015. One year later, Dave and Tony now own 4 more sport aircraft (that's 5 aircraft in total) and have significantly expanded their training facility and training program.

The business, SimplyFLY, operates out of the Aurora airport in Sugar Grove, IL. The flight school offers FAA-approved instruction for both Private Pilot Certificates and the Sport Pilot Certificate, which is a license for those seeking to fly for fun. The Sport Pilot can fly a light sport aircraft (LSA) during the day, anywhere in the country.

Most people imagine that flying, and learning to fly, is costly. But SimplyFLY has come up with some unique approaches to make the experience more affordable, and a lot more fun.

Trainees participate in a fixed price classroom training program with a very flexible classroom schedule. To make the flying experience more affordable, SimplyFLY offers shared aircraft ownership opportunities and low aircraft rental rates. Flying today is very safe, more affordable and it's easier to get your pilot's license.

I first got involved with SimplyFLY in October 2015 when I met Tony Sabos at a workshop in Geneva. Tony explained that he and his partner were ready to expand, and were hoping to acquire 2 or 3 additional aircraft, and that they hoped to be able to get a Line of Credit to purchase them.

I proposed that we prepare the appropriate business plan and cash flow projections for submission to a bank. As it turns out, banks shy away from loaning money to purchase aircraft. But the benefit of the cash flow exercise, which cast their financials in a view they had not used previously, was that the owners saw that they could afford to purchase the 2 new aircraft without bank help.

Now, with a total of 5 aircraft and an expanded training program, Dave and Tony are behaving as true business owners – they are working ON their business, not IN it. They seldom take



trainees up in the air. They are now more grounded (literally), working on their training program, outreach to the community, and marketing, which they both say is the real key to their success. Traditionally, flight schools wait for wannabe pilots to show up. Dave and Tony have taken a different approach. They bring their planes to outdoor events where people can see the aircraft, learn about the Sport Pilot certification, and discover how affordable lessons and plane rentals can be. This outreach has enabled them to very quickly grow the business.