

Travel – Tavares, Florida

LOTS OF SPLASHING AROUND AT AMERICA'S SEAPLANE CITY!

by Matt Elia

Tavares, Florida, known as America's Seaplane City was very busy during April and May! If you've been reading *Aviation Digest* you no doubt saw the ads for our SEAPLANE-A-PALOOZA Weekend event which was held Saturday, April 30th and Sunday, May 1st. Our big palooza, another word for party, offered something for everyone. To get ready for the big weekend we also hosted an informal fly-in to welcome some of the Sun 'n Fun seaplane pilots during early April.

Sun 'n Fun draws thousands of like-minded aviation enthusiasts and their families and friends to Florida each spring for an amazing event. Sun 'n Fun offers a great deal for visitors and I was extremely happy to be able to attend the event this year for the first time. I spent a day walking the flight line, looking at static display aircraft, watching planes come and go, visiting vendors and taking pictures.

Prior to the kickoff of the fun in Lakeland, the shores of Lake Dora and the Tavares Seaplane Base were very busy as a stopping off point for seaplane pilots enroute to Sun 'n Fun. Pilots from far and wide, across the country visited Tavares during early April, some on the way to Sun 'n Fun, others just coming to visit our city.

While Sun 'n Fun was underway, our team at the Tavares Seaplane Base was very excited to provide a place for seaplane pilots to splash in on Thursday, April 7th. Thursday has historically had a seaplane theme at Sun 'n Fun and this year, at least at the Tavares Seaplane Base, it was no different. The day started out like any other at the Seaplane Base, a few aircraft arrived and departed, Jones Brothers was busy with training flights and it was a beautiful sunny day. But then, shortly before lunch time, things started to heat up quickly!

On any given day a variety of seaplanes

splash in on Lake Dora, many visiting the Tavares Seaplane Base for fuel, seaplane themed gear from our Prop Shop or to visit one of the many restaurants throughout the Tavares Waterfront Entertainment District. The unique placement of our facility offers pilots the ability to land and immediately be right in the middle of a bustling community downtown, without having to contend with a taxi or shuttle ride.



Thanks to the folks at Sun 'n Fun, we knew that there would be some seaplane pilots looking for a place to splash in and have lunch on Thursday, April 7th so we were ready for them. The line staff in yellow vests, armed with handheld radios welcomed twelve visiting aircraft and approximately 25 pilots and passengers to the seaplane base that day.

By about 1 pm the aircraft apron was packed, and it was quite a sight. Many city residents and city staff members made a point to swing by and check out the happenings, hearing about the variety of aircraft that had come to visit. With a full aircraft apron and other aircraft beached along the shoreline in Wooton Park the visitors were not disappointed!

The big attention grabber of the fleet that day in April was the group of four Seabee aircraft that visited with us. Each was painted in its own creative, bright

way, further emphasizing the unique aircraft design!

Visitors to Wooton Park, the downtown Tavares waterfront park surrounding the Tavares Seaplane Base, were treated to their own impromptu fly-in. Seaplanes coming and going from Lake Dora is a very common occurrence any given day in America's Seaplane City, but when our Sun 'n Fun friends came to visit, it was clear that America's Seaplane City is the place to be for seaplane pilots!

Later in the month we geared up for a large-scale signature event, the first ever, SEAPLANE-A-PALOOZA Weekend. With the aim to engage the local community with a strong aviation theme, the event was multi-faceted. The Saturday portion went by the name, "Planes, Trains & BBQ."

BBQ cook teams arrived Thursday and Friday to participate in our annual BBQ contest on Saturday. The teams cooked

brisket, pulled pork, chicken and ribs, which judges evaluated based on a number of qualities. The "Cars on Main" car show filled the downtown streets with both classic and new vehicles. All the while the Orange Blossom Cannonball Express railroad offered old Western style robbery themed train rides for park goers. To top of the event, there were two air shows held over Lake Dora where six acts took to the skies to show off their masterful flying and thrill the spectators. Thousands of visitors filled the park, enjoyed their fill of BBQ and had a great day. Visiting aircraft lined the shore of Lake Dora throughout the day as seaplane pilot visitors came and left around the air shows.

The Sunday portion of the event was our annual Spring Fly-In event. Early in the morning the sweet scent of BBQ still lingered in the air as the first seaplanes began to arrive. As planes were pouring in for the event, we hosted our first FAASTeam (FAA

Safety Team) seminar, which was well attended, especially for a Sunday morning. After a brief pilots meeting with the Air Boss for the event, pilots stood aside their aircraft as the national anthem was performed live over the sounds system.

The crowd swelled to be the largest of any Tavares Seaplane Fly-In as shortly after 1 pm the flying competitions commenced. Pilots who registered to compete took part in four events including shortest take-off run, where the winner made short work of the competition on way to victory. Next pilots competed in the "really cool" watermelon bomb drop. Pilots took aim at a large buoy with small watermelons during this event. The winner for this contest came very close to the target, narrowly missing a direct buoy strike! Next pilots took their aim for the Spot Landing and then the Accuracy Landing events, the winners for these two contests displayed masterful aim and piloting abilities! Following the contests, the pilots returned up the ramp to the aircraft parking apron for a brief awards presentation, where contest winners were presented with their prizes.

Each visiting pilot and passenger who checked in with us for the Sun 'n Fun visit and for our Spring Fly-In received a Tavares gift bag including some fun Tavares "stuff" and a \$10 dining voucher, which was redeemable at many of the downtown restaurants, all within walking distance of the seaplane base. Pilots attending our seaplane fly-in received their complimentary Tavares Seaplane Fly-In t-shirts as well. We greatly appreciate pilots who come to visit our facility, especially during an event. Any time there is a fly-in type event we aim to provide something as a thank you for our visitors who fly in to see us, in addition to striving to provide the highest level of customer service we can, just as we do each and every day.

Keep in mind our next fly-in is our annual Monster Splash, scheduled for Saturday, October 29th, 2016. Visiting pilots will receive a similar thank you gift pack, so make sure you mark your calendars! During the Monster Splash pilots will be able to compete in our flying contest events including shortest takeoff run, spot landing, accuracy landing and the pumpkin bomb drop. Seriously, how cool does that sound? Even if you're not able to fly in for the Monster Splash, you're still welcome to attend and join us for the fun event! More information will be available soon, so stay tuned to www.tavares.org for updates or send me an email to be on our event notification list and we'll keep you posted as we get closer to the event.

Matthew Elia is the Aviation Manager for Tavares, Florida. Matt is a flight instructor, seaplane pilot and passionate aviation enthusiast. During fly-ins you can hear Matt on the mic along with his patented sound effects, "Ding!", "Dink!", "Boom!" and "Ker-plunk!" amongst others, as he announces the events for the crowd. Matt can be reached at melia@tavares.org.

Jones Brothers Air and Seaplane Adventures – Tavares, FL

Has a seaplane rating always been on your bucket list?

Jones Brothers Air and Seaplane Adventures has the answer you've been waiting for: the country's first designated seaplane flying club! Located in central Florida in the town of Tavares, known as America's Seaplane City, Jones Brothers offers much more than just the rating...

You will find it to be one of the ultimate places for seaplane adventure. With 1400 lakes of all shapes and sizes within Lake County, as well as multiple rivers, the training opportunities are endless. They offer single engine sea ratings on straight floats but if you want to receive continued training beyond the rating, Jones Brothers provides the opportunity to participate in an advanced training course featuring amphibious floats and flying boat amphibians with in depth attention to confined areas and advanced maneuvers.

Another thing setting Jones Brothers apart is "the package deal." For one low price EVERYTHING is included from your accommodations overlooking the seaplane base and the examiners fee and checkride, to hot breakfast each morning and fly in lunch opportunities. In America's seaplane city it's all right there, making convenience and fun the name of the game.

So back to where this story began... Once you have your rating, or if you already have one, Jones Brothers is the place to come to have the chance to fly floatplanes SOLO. Yes, you read that right...! Become a member of Jones Brothers' Seaplane Flying Club and you get the ability to go seaplane flying without an instructor (5 hours solo time included in membership) along with:

- 1 hour flight review per year that counts as a BFR
- Your own renters insurance policy that can be used at any airport
- Opportunity to fraternize with other seaplane pilots at our quarterly membership safety and social gatherings
- Jones Brothers PFG shirt.

At a cost of less than \$200 per month, it's less than the initial ratings package and much less than trying to justify the purchase of your own seaplane. This is truly the a unique opportunity to maintain proficiency and have tons of fun flying floats. You can take the plane out for just a quick splash, maybe a fly in lunch at the many lakefront restaurants in the area, or even for a couple of days. And bring a friend or family member along for the ride to expose them to the adventures of water flying.

For more information on their ratings and seaplane flying opportunities visit www.jonesairandsea.com.