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Teenage aviator lets her fingers fly over the harp

An Annie Wright School senior hopes to combine her two passions in college and career: aviation and playing the harp.

Author: *DEBBY ABE; The News Tribune*

Article Text:

Flying airplanes wouldn't normally summon thoughts of the harp.

That is, until you meet Leigh **Stringfellow**.

The Tacoma 18-year-old holds a pilot's license and plays the harp in symphonies and ensembles.

A senior at Annie Wright School, **Stringfellow** plans to further her two interests by earning a bachelor's degree in harp performance and continuing to fly on the side. Once she graduates from college, she hopes to attend flight school, rack up flying hours as a flight instructor and eventually become a corporate pilot.

She's been accepted by several universities, including her top choice of Vassar College, but is waiting to hear from others.

The aptly named **Stringfellow** became enchanted with the harp when she was 4 years old and heard the instrument accompany her older sister's choir on Benjamin Britten's "Ceremony of the Carols."

"I fell in love with the harp and wanted to play," said **Stringfellow**, who had just started piano lessons.

By third grade, the 10-year-old had talked her parents, Dr. Steve and Virginia **Stringfellow**, into adding harp

lessons to her extracurricular schedule. By the time, she was in eighth grade, her parents bought her a \$14,000 pedal harp of her own.

Now she practices one hour a day before school. "I can't imagine not playing it," she said.

She performs with the Tacoma Youth Harp Ensemble, the Tacoma Youth Symphony and the youth symphony's Carnegie Hall Orchestra, which is scheduled to play in the famed Manhattan hall in May.

Stringfellow's interest in flight took off with an aviation course that included one lesson in a plane in ninth grade at Annie Wright.

That summer she started flying lessons with the help of a \$1,700 aviation scholarship from the Bremerton Pilots and Tenants Association.

By April 2004, she had flown more than the minimum required 40 hours under various conditions, passed a written exam and met other requirements to earn a single-engine, private pilot's license. She flies a Cessna 172 or Cessna 152, which she rents by the hour at the Bremerton airport.

"It's empowering being able to go wherever I want and being in control when I'm up there," she said of flying. "It gives me a sense of independence and freedom."

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Caption:

BW PHOTO: **Stringfellow**

Memo:

Show & Tell ; Student Spotlight

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