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Editor Ian J. Twombly and contributor Jason Blair debate the merits of learning to fly at a local FBO versus a high-capacity academy.

Fly local

Make connections close to home

BY IAN J. TWOMBLY

IF I HAD A NICKEL for every time someone asked me whether they should learn to fly locally or go to an academy setting, I would be able to retire at 64. At the risk of losing a year's worth of crossword-puzzle time, I'll give away the advice here: Stay home.

Flight academies are really good at what they do, which is one thing only: creating airline pilots. Even then, I might be able to make the argument for staying local, but unless you were born wearing captain's bars, the choice is easy. It comes down to four primary reasons: cost, networking, training, and future opportunities.

Most people who learn to fly at their local airport will do it less expensively than at an academy. Academies have a lot of overhead: newer airplanes, a bigger administrative staff, marketing budgets,

human resources, and so on. It's only natural they have to charge more. And flying locally, you can keep your day job.

The networking opportunities afforded simply by hanging out at the airport are invaluable. Many academies offer airline hiring agreements, which are valuable for those who go that route. For everyone else, it's an unneeded benefit. Most people get charter, corporate, and flight instruct-

ing jobs because they know someone, which is hard to do when you're cramming for a stage check at an airport 300 miles away.

The most reliable job opportunity from staying close is the first instructing job. When someone earns a flight instructor certificate at a school, the school often will offer the new CFI a job. Noncareer CFIs will get right-seat opportunities in cool airplanes, and career CFIs can meet charter or corporate pilots.

Most important, training at a local school cements your place in the community. Research has shown that pilots who become part of their local flying community will fly for longer and see more value in their experiences. Your local CFI can be a source of encouragement, throughout your training and beyond.

It's true that academies have great success records, thanks to their approved syllabi and structured programs. The less desirable effect is that pilots who learn at academies often fly any airplane as a mini Boeing 737. You may end up knowing the various V_y speeds for a Cessna 172 up through 14,000 feet, but you won't know about the great airport restaurant 15 miles away.

Speaking of food, that industry is encouraging diners to support small farms, reduce pollution, and increase the variety in our diets. They call it "eat local." I think we should fly local, too. **AOPA**

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The case for 'pilot mills'

Go with the pros

BY JASON BLAIR

WOULD YOU RATHER have surgery from a doctor who does it on the weekends, or from someone who does it as a full-time job? If you want to get pilot training, you should get it from someone who does it professionally, not as a hobby.

This type of professional training takes place at providers such as Airline Transport Professionals (ATP), American Flyers, and FlightSafety International, to name a few. Universities and colleges do the same. The training is highly structured and goal oriented, and it takes advantage of the economies of scale available to providers that have multiple locations and hundreds of students. You can call these places pilot mills if you want, but they get the job done and they do it well. They train and certify pilots quickly and efficiently.

These may not be the best fit for someone who wants to be a hobby pilot and only has one day a week to devote to training. But for those seeking training for an aviation career, they offer significant benefits compared to traditional local FBOs.

Many providers like these create custom training materials. When you show up for training (and many times before), some will have already provided study materials that directly relate to the scheduled training. Most use structured, syllabus-based training to ensure your study is focused.

Many also have extensive maintenance programs to help limit maintenance-related training delays. A local FBO with one or two aircraft typically cannot provide such prompt service.

Most high-capacity training providers are located in places where weather doesn't significantly inhibit training schedules. This helps efficiency and training reliability.

Training is typically condensed, which interrupts less of pilots' lives and gets them moving toward career options faster. Condensed training also focuses pilots, making them commit time and resources to accomplishing their goals. Completion rates in these environments typically are better than 80 percent, while the national average has been cited as an 80-percent dropout rate.

Instructors at these types of providers are full-time professionals, not hobby instructors who work on weekends. These CFIs know how to help a student succeed. Plus, large-scale training providers regularly develop relationships with companies that hire pilots.

High-capacity training providers offer professional, efficient, career-based training. There is a reason that, when airlines seek relationships for filling cockpit seats, they call these providers. **AOPA**

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