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## Seventh Annual Expo and Fly-In concludes with big exit *Morning wraps up festive fun*



**An American flag hangs over the road from U.S. Highway 19, just south of Cross City, leading into the Cross City Airport. Vehicles from Central Florida Electric Cooperative and Duke Energy Florida work together to keep the flag flying.**

### **Story, Photos and Video**

**By Jeff M. Hardison © April 3, 2022 at 8:12 p.m.**

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**CROSS CITY** – Thousands of people chose to leave the same area at the same time late Saturday morning (April 2) after a severe thunderstorm, complete with significant lightning bolts, swept over the Cross City Airport.

The strong thunderstorm even dropped dime-sized hail (balls of ice) and drenching rain some minutes later on a publisher's car as he headed into Chiefland after departure from the airport in Dixie County.

Despite a 20-minute clog of vehicles at the end of the Seventh Annual Dixie County Chamber of Commerce Fly-In and Cruise-In, it was all good.

The sudden storm, although expected, made the whole area from the baseball fields of Cross City next to the Florida Department of Health Complex and all the way through the Cross City Airport area into one gigantic parking lot. Even if they reached a paved road after departing from a grassy parking area, drivers sat with their feet on brakes, occasionally putting the vehicles into park, and even shutting off the engine as they sat, and sat, and sat.

The Dixie County Sheriff's Office relatively quickly came to the rescue and had everyone departing from the area, but that initial wait was tiresome for some.

And those minutes of idleness after the morning of excitement, entertainment, brotherly love and all that is good and fun, was a bore.

The clog at the exit point was necessary to take down the big flag that was across that road.

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The huge exit from the tremendous event capped off a morning of fun, fun, fun for plenty of people Saturday. A number of folks were quick to share with one another the active radar monitors on their cell phones, showing the actual course of a band of thunderheads going toward the center of festivities.

The United States Coast Guard, United States Army, United States Air Force, United States Space Force and other potential participants did not bring aircraft. Last year's flyover by the USCG out of Clearwater was awesome and inspirational as giant plane and helicopter flew over the airport.

All of the pilots and ground control folks this year saw the same radar images as people with that app on their cellphones.

Not only would there be probable wind and rain elements increasing hazards to flying between whichever points of origin of launch and the Cross City Airport as the destination for landing, but being socked in and stuck somewhere played into pilots' choices not to fly in, too.

Pilots of smoke-writing aircraft "bailed out" from participating. No, they did not make an emergency parachute descent from an aircraft in danger. Those acrobatic pilots just did not show up, or they left before the start of the fun on Saturday morning.

Before the giant bolts of lightning came shooting out of the sky, though, the Seventh Annual Dixie County Chamber of Commerce Fly-In and Cruise-in did shine like a bright star gleaming through a chilly morning. The festive event warmed the hearts of thousands of participants, just as the event has brought joy to so many in its previous six annual iterations.

**To see the 2021 coverage of the Expo and Fly-in, click [HERE](#).**



**Kathryn M. Lancaster of Levy County sings *The Star-Spangled Banner* as part of the opening ceremonies of the event.**

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**In this somewhat blurry picture take from a dash cam video, one of the members of the Dixie County Sheriff's Office is seen guiding people out onto U.S. 19 as thousands of people seek to depart at the same time. The DCSO had to hold traffic up for some minutes as brave linemen from Central Florida Electric Cooperative and Duke Energy Florida went up in inclement weather to take an American flag down that was flying over the entrance to the event. Giant lightning bolts were hitting in the area. Sheriff Darby Butler and members of the DCSO, the CFEC and the DEF deserve a note of thanks for helping wrap up the event when the thunderstorm struck quickly.**



**Some of the many people walk along the row of tents where there was plenty of activity.**

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In this video, clips are put together to show a 1973 Piper PA-28R-200 owned by a man from Lake City as it comes in for a landing. Then, a 1998 Cessna 182S owned by a man from Steinhatchee parks at the Cross City Airport. After that, the helicopter from

Tallahassee Helicopters takes people for a ride. And finally, the helicopter, a 2011 Robinson Helicopter R44, owned by Capital Helicopters LLC, comes in for a landing in the background as children enjoy free rides on a 'train' of 'flying' vehicles. This free 'train ride' is provided by Chapter 797 of the Experimental Aircraft Association of Live Oak. The first 'flying train car' in this link is a flying saucer. There was also a bounce house at this event.

[CLICK ON THE PHOTO](#) to see the video.

Cross City Mayor Kenneth 'Tank' Lee is seen walking toward the airport from the parking lot. Joining Mayor Lee are (from left) Holly Brigman (his niece), Debbie Brigman (the mayor's sister) and Travis Holmes, a family friend.



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Renowned musician and substitute teacher Bob Leichner, and Carol West, a highly active Dixie County Chamber of Commerce member who has served as president and is a strong force in the annual Expo and Fly-In, are seen moments before the start of the fun annual event at Cross City Airport.



Florida Department of Corrections Sgt. A. Riley (foreground) and FDOC Sgt. C. Tanner are seen at the tent where they are working to recruit new employees to the FDOC, and especially to Cross City Correctional Institution. By the way, starting salary goes to \$20 an hour in July.

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**CFEC Communications Specialist Alison DeLoach represents for Central Florida Electric Cooperative at the Expo. She was giving away night lights, stress-squeeze things (yellow in the bucket), as well as literature to help people.**



**Officers with the Tri-County Disabled American Veterans Chapter 63 are seen here at the Expo and Fly-In. They are (from left) Sr. Vice Cmdr. Max 'Freeze' (no last name), Cmdr. Larry Foland, Jr. Vice Cmdr. Ken Bamberger and Chaplain, the Rev. Dr. Eugene Gibbins.**

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**This 2011 Robinson Helicopter R44, owned by Capital Helicopters LLC and tagged with Tallahassee Helicopters, is the single-most active provider of rides at Cross City Airport on April 2. Rides cost \$40 per person and included a five-minute flight that was enjoyed by many.**



**One of a handful of airplanes that flew in for the event is seen as it comes in for a landing.**

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Destined to be among the first passengers to enjoy the helicopter rides (from left) Brian Staudinger, Devinn Staudinger, Laura Dolbeer and Zander Staudinger, all of Old Town, are seen as they stroll away from the registration point, which was near to the hangar marked for Anderson Columbia.



Tallahassee Helicopters Pilot Torin Emhof, Pilot (and owner) Thomas Diefenbach and Domenick Bllavigna agree to a photo opportunity in front of the star helicopter of the day. These guys provided lots of rides to people for a fair price.

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**One of the airplanes that was flown in for the fly-in event is seen here before its pilot and passengers exited the vehicle.**



**Known as an experimental aircraft, a 2007 Sea Rey (amphibian -land or water) comes in for a landing at the Cross City Airport.**

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**Barbara West and her pilot husband Bill D. West stand next to the plane that brought them from Bell (Gilchrist County) to Cross City on Saturday. Bill West said the plane is a 2007 Sea Rey (amphibian - land or water).**



**Children enjoy free rides on a 'train' of 'flying' vehicles. This free 'train ride' is provided by Chapter 797 of the Experimental Aircraft Association of Live Oak. The first 'flying train car' in this link is a flying saucer. There was also a bounce house at this Expo and Fly-In.**

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**Dixie County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Amy Evans greets visitors at the event. Sgt. Evans is the public information officer serving Dixie County High Sheriff Darby Butler. All of the DCSO members are actually extensions of the sheriff. The DCSO team helped people exit safely when a strong thunderstorm struck a bit before noon.**