

# CITYNEWS

KITCHENER POST

## Welcome to Top Gun

*Waterloo Warbirds give people with the need for speed the thrill of their lives in fighter jets*

BY BILL JACKSON  
Kitchener Post staff

SUBMITTED PHOTO  
Some recent fliers at Waterloo Warbirds get set for takeoff.

Short on time and still decked out in a camouflaged flight suit, Ramona Ostrander was gassing up her car, en route to a home inspection, when a man asked if it was her T-55 Vampire that frequently flies overhead.

Ostrander, a local realtor, is also an aviation enthusiast who volunteers with the Waterloo Warbirds. And though she hadn't intended to pose as a walking billboard, a marketing push might be warranted.

Those affiliated with the Warbirds, a local business offering flight experiences in Cold War-era military jets, say it's one of the best-kept secrets around.

Located inside the Region of Waterloo International Airport's Hanger 51, formerly a BlackBerry base for business trips, the Waterloo Warbirds has operated here since 2014.

"To get the experience of grabbing the control stick and flying a jet — where else can you do that?" said David Kreutzkamp, sales and marketing manager with the air-

port's Flightline Services, a main sponsor of the volunteer-run organization.

Kreutzkamp has worked with the Warbirds for the past decade, an operation which grew from a collection of privately-owned jets that were flying out of the Jet Aircraft Museum in London.

"While the name is new to the public, the staff and aircraft are not," according to the website.

The first aircraft, a Canadair CT-133, was purchased from the Government of Canada back in 2007 at a time when there were no T-33s in Canada flying privately — a process that took several years.

The original grey paint was historically accurate, but a new paint scheme gave birth to the Mako Shark in 2011, based on the commemorative "Silver Shark" T-33 flown by the VU32 squadron in 1992.

The Mako Shark began to operate under loan to the Jet Aircraft Museum in London and several new additions were added to the fleet, including a DH-115 de Havilland Vampire that operated in the Swiss Air Force until the early 1990s.

When the Jet Aircraft Museum decided

to change its mandate of flying loan aircraft in 2014, aircraft sponsors decided to continue their financial support and focus the program on pure flying, to ensure that the aircraft continued to fly for the public, and the Waterloo Warbirds was born.

The featured planes — now including two T-33s, an L-29 Viper, T-55 Vampire and a Mig-15 named Natasha — are privately owned and loaned to the organization that manages, operates and maintains them.

"That's the way it's most effective," Kreutzkamp said. "The owners will tell you without such an organization of at least 10 — and we're now 20 volunteers — you can't effectively or safely operate these airplanes. You need a team.

"You need people that are doing the Transport Canada handling of paperwork, you need team members that are marketing, selling and raising the profile, and you need team members who are maintaining and helping operate the aircraft on the days we fly, with all the ground equipment that's required."

Other than the aircraft maintenance engineers who provide certified inspec-

tions, no one with the Warbirds receives a paycheck, and business is mostly a break-even venture.

The overarching mandate is preserving and telling the stories of the planes, as well as the servicemen and women who flew them. But the main reason people come to fly them is the rush.

Nowhere else in Ontario, or Canada for that matter, can people experience the G-force of a post-Second World War fighter jet, flying at speeds of up to 650 km/h and at altitudes of up to 12,000 feet. "We have the most active, most visible and the largest organization tied to operating vintage jets in Canada," Kreutzkamp said.

People can fly in a Lancaster bomber in Mount Hope or go to Tillsonburg to experience a Harvard trainer — both carry a lot of history and nostalgia.

But the difference between that experience and what the Warbirds offer is akin to going for a Sunday cruise or driving a Formula-1 race car, Ostrander said. "The G-force, speed and aerobatic elements you just can't experience in other planes."

Continued on page 17



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# ‘People talk about living in the clouds — this experience truly defines that’

Continued from page 1

“It’s a fast-paced, relatively intense flight experience,” added Kreutzkamp, who said the Warbirds don’t get bogged down in too many other areas of aviation.

Some customers are pilots themselves and most come with at least some knowledge or interest in the industry. “But we’re a thrill,” he conceded.

The Warbirds essentially offer the Top Gun experience, less the cockiness of Tom Cruise.

“We can get Maverick in the backseat and because of the conversation that goes on between that passenger and the pilot during the flight, they’re going to experience the level of thrill that they want,” Ostrander explained, adding the majority of flights, priced between \$1,000 and \$2,500, are purchased as gifts.

Similar to a student-driver, even those with limited experience can take control of the plane for a portion of the flight and cater it to their liking with the help of the pilot.

Most customers have the need for speed. Others like doing rolls and experiencing technical manoeuvres. And a few have discovered they might not like doing them as much as they thought.

Because she doesn’t have a pilot’s licence, Ostrander said she experiences it more like the general public would.

“To be in an aircraft with a completely glass canopy is in of itself a tremendously different experience than any other plane. You see the world pass you by,” she said.

“The wings are behind you, the noise is behind you and the whole sky is surrounding you, and it’s one of the most incredible experiences of literally leaving everything on the ground when you get up there.”

Flights take about half an hour, but the entire experience takes about a half day, including a training component for cockpit safety.

“This is what soldier pilot were put in — there is no luxury,” Ostrander explained. “It’s raw. You’re strapped into two sets of harnesses — one’s your parachute, the other’s your G-harness. You’re very immobile in some elements and you’ve got a

helmet on your head.”

The experience is liberating and people also leave feeling part of a team, she said. Fliers are required to purchase a \$60 membership and get their name listed in the plane’s log book alongside the names of other pilots, including those who served and protected our country in uniform.

“No one leaves the Leviathan at Canada’s Wonderland saying, ‘That’s my Leviathan,’” said Ostrander. “But many people leave saying that’s my Vampire or my Mig, because they aren’t just a passenger, they’re a crew member.”

So, if anyone’s asking, it is Ostrander’s Viper weaving in and out of the cloud cover above Waterloo region.

She knows residents below aren’t always in love with sound of planes overhead, but the Warbirds are hoping to create a positive image in the community and expand outreach in the future.

Volunteers plan to be involved with Canada’s 150th birthday celebration this summer and have done flyovers the past three years at local Remembrance Day ceremonies at no charge.

The organization already has ties to air cadet programs at the airport and Kreutzkamp believes there’s opportunity to engage schools and community groups with tours and speaking engagements in the future.

“Most of people don’t even know that they have five fighter jets, privately owned, that are willing to do flyovers, community involvement and outreach here within the community,” he said.

The door to the hangar is always open, at least figuratively, and more details about the Waterloo Warbirds, as well as contact information, can be found at [waterloowarbirds.com](http://waterloowarbirds.com).

“The local community takes a lot of pride in innovation and the growth of its local tech sector, and we’d kind of like to be that treasure within aviation,” said Ostrander.

“We’d like the entire region to be proud about its aviation statement.”

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## La Yapa

*Bolivian phrase for that little extra gift given in gratitude by market vendors ...*



**Andrew Coppolino**

**Kitchener Food, Seen**

The local food movement is clearly past the trend phase and has become a habit and a mindset for many people. However, there are also many for whom the way of eating and cooking is both unfamiliar and not a priority.

With that as her motivation, Chelsey Padron, manager of Kitchener’s Lancaster Smokehouse, is overseeing a food and beer event on June 18 that targets local small businesses in order to showcase local food entrepreneurship and products — and keep local top-of-mind.

“I work hand in hand with all the local breweries on a daily basis at the Smokehouse, and I see how hard it is to get people to understand that local matters. Many people don’t understand the dedication to only buying Waterloo Region-grown products to use in recipes and don’t see the value in doing so,” Padron says.

The result is “Hops for Pops Craft Beer and Local Matters Fest.” For Padron, the Fathers’ Day event is one way to continue to spread the word and introduce people to what she calls “this way of life.”

Hops for Pops will be held from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Doon Heritage Museum in

Kitchener and is designed to showcase local companies and inform the community of the hard work they do and the quality products they create.

Padron says that, like many other food businesses, the Lanc works hard to use as many local food and beer suppliers as possible for their business and creates events to help promote the businesses. “We pride ourselves in working hand in hand with these companies to bring awareness to their products and services,” she says.

Participating food businesses at Hops for Pops will include 12 breweries known as the K-W Craft Collective as well as a sampling of local food trucks and other small businesses “who want to be part of helping people understand the importance of supporting our community by keeping it local,” says Padron.

“We want to help companies to remain local with community support. From speaking with these breweries and business owners, we have come to the conclusion that we all need to stand together.”

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*Andrew Coppolino is a Kitchener-based food writer and broadcaster.*

*Visit him at [waterlooregioneats.com](http://waterlooregioneats.com).*

## Scratching POST



Meet this blazing but gentle guy, Flame, at the Humane Society. He is nothing but a soft soul who loves to keep the people around him warm. To meet Flame, or other pets available for adoption, call 519-745-5615.

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