

# Young at Heart: Conversations with the Pros

Obie Young recently earned a master certificated flight instructor (CFI) designation for the fourth time, a distinction achieved by fewer than 500 of the approximately 85,000 CFIs in the country. In the course of his aviation career, Young has been an airline transport pilot, airshow performer, director of the FAA production studios in Lakeland, Fla., and manager of one of the largest, most active and innovative FAA safety programs in the United States. Focus FAA spoke with him recently in conjunction with the Sun 'n Fun air show, in which he plays a major role.

## **Focus: You've played many roles in your aviation career. Which has been the most fulfilling?**

I used to say that I was a full time aviator and flight instructor by profession and personal conviction. Over the years, I have been involved with different aspects of aviation. However, one aspect seems to connect all the others: Communications. I have enjoyed all my roles because I have had the opportunity to communicate with a variety of folks. The roles that I had in life were the best roles at that time. Right now, I can truly say that



**Obie Young at the camera in studio B of the Lakeland aviation safety facility.**

being a FAA safety program manager is the best role I have ever had in aviation. We have the opportunity at the FAA Production studios to communicate with many people from all walks of life.

**Focus: With all of that going on, when do you find time to fly?**

I still love to fly; however, I do not get to fly as much as I once did. I get to fly because, as an aviation safety inspector, we must maintain currency. In the safety program we fly with the public during the pilot/aircraft courtesy evaluation program. I get to fly some in support of the FAA Young Eagle Program and the Boy Scout Aviation merit badge program.

**Focus: How much has aviation safety improved since you started flying?**

Wow ... what a question. The best answer I can give to that is a quote we use in the Orlando flight instructor special emphasis program: “The eye cannot see what the mind does not behold.” In other words, you do not know what you do not know.

Aviation safety has improved tremendously since I became involved with aviation. The aviation system that we work in is not a simple one. It’s affected by the economy, world conflicts, weather, people, and many other factors. I feel that the human factors — that is, people — is the most complex of any of these. I think we — FAA and industry — are right on target with the system safety approach.

**Focus: What’s the single most important safety advance the FAA has offered aviation?**

The most important safety advance was to encourage communications by individual safety program managers. These managers have developed programs; conducted safety seminars; made videos,



**Obie Young is an  
FAA safety program  
manager.**

DVDs, CDs; developed Internet sites; broadcast over the FAA aviation training network; and helped to develop the latest tool — the Internet site [www.faasafety.gov](http://www.faasafety.gov).

### Focus: What did you think of the movie, “The Aviator?”

It was a good movie and again brought aviation to the public at large. I feel that “The Aviator” is similar to Top Gun and Star Wars ... other aviation and space movies that appeal to the general public.

#### “Gems of Time”

refers to a sign hung in the waiting room of Lakeland studios. “I do not think it is completely original, but a combination of several folks’ thoughts,” said Obie Young. “It sort of states how I feel about life and what we do with it.”

- You have 60 minutes for your presentation at the FAA safety center and production studios.
- We are each blessed with a string of 365 pearl days in each year that we spend on this old earth.
- Each pearl day contains 24 ruby hours.
- Each ruby hour contains 60 emerald minutes.
- Each emerald minute contains 60 diamond seconds.
- These diamond seconds are perhaps the most overlooked and quickly forgotten. They are perhaps the most priceless of all the “gems of time” and can have the most significant and long-lasting impact.
- One should spend these “gems of time” wisely and for worthwhile purposes, such as spiritual growth, country, family, and your fellow man.
- The next “gems of time” that you spend live, on stage, on the air at the FAA safety center and production studios will affect aviation safety. ➔