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Uncle Wiggly Wings does Candy Bomber run at American Heritage School

Karissa Neely Daily Herald 10 hrs ago



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Students cheer and run to get candy as candy bomber Gail Halvorsen performs a flyover at American Heritage Elementary by dropping candy bombs on Wednesday, May 24, 2017. SAMMY JO HESTER. Daily Herald

American Heritage School in American Fork enjoyed a unique field day Wednesday afternoon, with a visit from Uncle Wiggly Wings himself, Gail Halvorsen.

Halvorsen, the 96-year-old known as the Candy Bomber, flew in a helicopter over American Heritage School's fields, while his son, Bob Halvorsen, released about 200 candy bars in bundles of 10 each attached to parachutes. Gail Halvorsen is famous for participating in the 1948 Berlin Airlift, and dropping gum and candy to the German children who were starving in the city.

"Gail is famous all over Germany for what he did. There are museums and monuments to him there, but there's really none here," said Paul Jensen, operations manager for the local Civil Air Patrol squadron and assistant director of the hoped-for Gail S. Halvorsen Aviation Education Center.

Wednesday's Candy Bomber drop was due to the right people connecting at the right time. Brad Brown, owner of ATL Technology in Springville, is a pilot and loves Halvorsen's story. He also wants to make the Gail S. Halvorsen Aviation Education Center a reality. Since Brown's children also attend American Heritage, it ended up being a good connection.

"Brad is a very generous guy. He's donated both to the Gail Halvorsen Foundation, and to American Heritage school," Jensen said.

Before Wednesday's drop, many of the 860 students at the school studied Halvorsen's story. James Stewart, director of the Halvorsen Education Center, shared additional stories and pictures from Halvorsen's Germany experiences Tuesday at a school assembly. Halvorsen couldn't be there in person, but participated via a video presentation.

"American Heritage is dedicated to remembering. What Gail did was something we should all remember. If we forget those children at the fence that had no clothes or food, we're likely to repeat the mistakes of the past," said Grant Beckwith, the school's principal. "He is a man of liberty, a man of faith, a man of sacrifice. We're trying to help our students remember the stakes it takes to remain free."

Brown started Wednesday's event by flying over the students in his Pilatus PC-12 airplane. He was greeted with waves, cheers, shouts of excitement and "Look, he wiggled his wings!" Brown then circled the field while Halvorsen and the crew of the helicopter came in low for the candy drop.

According to Susan Reed, Brown's executive assistant, this was Bob Halvorsen's first time doing a Candy Bomber run with his father. Because of his father's age and health, Bob got to do the actual dropping.

While only the youngest students were allowed to run into the field to grab the candy, an additional 1,800 candy bars were handed out to older students and their families. Reed said the whole event wouldn't be possible without Nestle's donation of 2,000 full-size Crunch candy bars.

"Nestle was so good to us," Reed said.

The field where Halvorsen dropped the candy bars is 28 acres American Heritage recently purchased. Beckwith said the school is bursting at the seams and needs to expand. They will add to the school's campus in three phases, with the first including an athletic center with a multi-court competition gym, indoor track, dance rooms, an outdoor stadium, and new athletic fields.

Brown, Jensen and Stewart hope to raise money to build the Gail S. Halvorsen Aviation Education Center before Halvorsen passes away.

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Civil Air Patrol squadron hopes to raise cool \$1 million for Gail Halvorsen museum, hangar

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Karissa Neely reports on Business & Community events, and loves telling people's stories.

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