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LIVING LEGACY Ray Leninger

A continuing series chronicling the stories of our parents and grandparents.

Leninger is dedicated to Angel Flight

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IF YOU DON'T believe in angels, you haven't met Ray Leninger.

When Leninger and his wife sold their business several years ago, he was certain of two things.

The first is that he wanted to try his hand at being a pilot.

"Be careful what you ask for," he said. "I casually mentioned to my wife that I would be interested in learning how to fly. The next thing I knew, I was enrolled in classes."

Leninger began taking lessons in 2002 through the Madison Flyers. He eventually earned both his private license and, later, his instrument rating. He currently has around 350 hours.

"I am what you call a new pilot," he said.

Leninger said, although he has always had the flying bug, he never necessarily imagined himself doing it.

"Even as a child, I was always fascinated with airplanes," he said. "While a lot of people don't pay attention to what is going on up above them, I always have. I would just stand there and watch the planes fly by."

Besides learning to fly, Leninger also knew that he wanted to do something meaningful with his life post-retirement. He said he was inspired by reading a book called *Halftime*.

"BASICALLY, the book talks about being successful in the first half of your life," he said. "During the second half of your life, *Halftime* encourages you to be significant. I knew that I had been successful in my work like, up to this point and it was time for me to do something more with my time, my talents and my resources."

Leninger, a native of northern Illinois, not only served in the United States Air Force, he had a long career with Motorola Communications. He and his wife retired several years ago, when they sold their local business, Reservoir Stationers. They have two children, four grandchildren, are members of Lakeside Presbyterian Church and are active in their community.

"Things were right in my life," he said. "It was time for me to be significant and give back in a way that impacted the lives of others."

Leninger heard of an opportunity to combine these two aspects of his life. Being a volunteer pilot would allow him the opportunity both fly and make a difference in the lives of others. By becoming involved in several non-profit pilot organizations, Leninger would have the opportunity to give wings to critically ill children and adults by flying them, at no cost to the patient, to receive necessary medical treatment.



Angels Take Flight If you don't believe in angels, meet Ray Leninger. Leninger is a pilot who volunteers by flying critically ill patients to receive medical care in other states.

Angel Flight and Grace Flight of America provide free air transportation for medical and humanitarian purposes and, while the service is at no cost to the patient, there is a cost to the pilot which may include fuel and plane rental.

"These kinds of organizations are supported completely through donations," he said.

The volunteer pilot organizations specialize in transporting patients to receive potentially life-saving medical treatments that are not necessarily available in their local area. The majority of the patients served are children who have repeated healthcare needs that require travel to out-of-state clinics and hospitals.

Leninger said the goal of the organizations is to remove the transportation burden from critically ill or severely injured patients who are unable to travel commercially for either financial or medical reasons.

"Many people associate these kinds of organizations with financial need, but that is not always the case," he said. "In some cases, people who are critically ill cannot travel commercially because the environment is not sterile or safe for someone who is battling a life-threatening illness."

Last year alone, Angel Flight flew more than 2,500 missions serving people with more than 126 medical condi-

tions for patients ranging in age from newborn to 96 years old.

Leninger became involved in being a volunteer pilot five years ago, but began flying the missions regularly three years ago. Since that time, he has flown an average of one trip a month, taking patients to receive medical treatment in states ranging from Texas to Georgia.

"THERE IS A GREAT satisfaction in knowing that you have helped someone," he said. "On a personal note, it is a great feeling to know that I am doing something that I love for a great cause," he said. "There is also a tremendous amount of satisfaction that comes in knowing that you have used your talents and resources to help someone in need."

Besides flying patients to receive medical care, Leninger said the organizations also fly humanitarian missions.

During hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Angel Flight served as a first responder, flying almost 500 missions transporting supplies, medical equipment and emergency personnel to impacted areas. Angel Flight also served during the 9/11 attacks by transporting supplies and disaster relief workers when all commercial air traffic was grounded.

Currently, Grace Flight is participating in humanitarian efforts to get aid like medical supplies and water to Haiti.