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Widjiwagan campers of the year go along for the ride

YMCA board member flies duo aboard his seaplane

By SUZANNE NORMAND BLACKWOOD
Staff Writer

Katie Wright, 12, and Houston Coppola, 11, were treated to flights aboard a seaplane piloted by Jimmy Granbery, a fourth-generation board member for the YMCA of Middle Tennessee. Granbery also is chief executive officer of H.G. Hill Realty, a major land donor of the YMCA throughout the years.

The seaplane flights above J. Percy Priest Lake have been a tradition at Camp Widjiwagan for four years. The two campers chosen each year to take the plane ride are the male and female Campers of the Year.

Houston, a Green Hills resident, described the experience as "thrilling."

"I had a weird feeling in my stomach," he said. "It was kind of vibrating."



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Pilot Jimmy Granbery, left, YMCA's Camp Widjiwagan campers of the year Houston Coppola, 11, and Katie Wright, 12, and Camp Director B. J. Davis walk toward a seaplane that the campers will ride in above the campground. (JEANNE REASONOVER / THE TENNESSEAN)



Houston said the view was "nice," and he would like to fly again sometime.

Katie, who lives in Franklin, said she got to see Camp Widjiwagan from the air. "It was really fun," she said.

"I got to fly the plane, too," she added. "For about four seconds."

Granbery said he likes to share his "enjoyment of the world of seaplane flying" with the young campers. He likes to "offer them the opportunity to see the view and enjoy the serenity and freedom of flying," as he does, he said.

"This camp is the greatest treasure in the entire Middle Tennessee Y portfolio," Granbery added.

Katie said it felt "really good" to be named Camper of the Year. "I've been wanting it forever," she said.

Houston's mom, Jona, was there to see her son fly for the first time. And to know it had to do with the honor of being Camper of the Year made it even more special, she said.

"I'm very proud of him."

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Pilot Jimmy Granbery lands his seaplane on the lake at YMCA's Camp Widjiwagan after taking one of the campers of the year on a ride above the campground. (JEANNE REASONOVER / THE TENNESSEAN)

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