

Texas School Supply Airlift

In the aftermath of hurricane Harvey, many opportunities presented themselves to assist those who were impacted and in need of basic supplies to begin the rebuilding process. One such opportunity occurred on Saturday, September 9th, when pilots responded to a call for volunteers to airlift school supplies to the airport at Beaumont/Port Arthur, Texas (KBPT). Several AYA members made their airplanes available to assist in this effort. These members included Lee Ziegenhals, Keith Hopkinson and Alyssa Pennington, Tracy Norris and Don Cochran.

A request was made to the organization Aero Bridge by the Police Chief of Port Arthur to arrange an airlift of school supplies to help them get the kids back to school. Aero Bridge is an organization with a mission to assist in times of catastrophic emergency by coordinating donated aircraft to provide a response to the emergency.

In response to the request, Aero Bridge arranged for a truckload of supplies to be driven to Austin Bergstrom International Airport (KAUS). The supplies, nearly 7000 lbs worth, were loaded on a truck in Phoenix and driven to Austin.

Approximately 25 general aviation airplanes/pilots answered the request made by Aero Bridge for the airlift on Saturday. Many of these pilots had already responded to numerous requests in the previous weeks to airlift various supplies from communities not affected by the flooding to the Beaumont/Port Arthur airport.

The work of unloading the truck from Phoenix was handled by a Boy Scout Troop from the Austin area. The young men carefully moved the supplies one box/bag at a time onto one of several waiting pickup trucks. These trucks then drove to each of the airplanes where the Boy Scouts helped load the airplane under the supervision of the pilot. Once loaded, each airplane began the flight to Beaumont/Port Arthur approximately 200 nm to the east of Austin.

At the destination, members of the Port Arthur Police Department brought a vehicle to each arriving airplane on the ramp and assisted with the unloading.

The coordination between all of the participating agencies was a remarkable process to observe and participate in. From the arrival at Austin ahead of the airlift to the departure at Port Arthur after completing an airlift flight, it was very clear that Aero Bridge and their team had done a remarkable job to make this airlift happen and run smoothly. Both towered airports, ATC, the Port Arthur Police Department, the Boy Scouts and many local pilots worked in unison to make this a successful airlift. It was great to have some of the AYA members participate and play a small role in this operation.

A special thanks goes to Tracy Norris for posting the information about the Aero Bridge airlift on the Grumman Gang. That notice made it possible to add additional airplanes and pilots to the airlift who might not have known about it otherwise. Thank you Tracy!

