

# Teachers, media rep have once-in-a-lifetime experience in Blue Angel #7

By Penny Randall  
Editor

Joey Long, Nolan Reynerson and Crystal Dupre' would all consider themselves extremely lucky people.

Long, a teacher with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians School District at Choctaw Central High School; Reynerson, district director for the Choctaw Area Council of Boy Scouts of America; and The Meridian Star Publisher Crystal Dupre' representing the media, were the backseat riders in Blue Angels #7 jet on March 23.

Lt. Dave Tickle, a native of Birmingham, Ala., is the pilot of #7. Tickle earned his Wings of Gold at NAS Meridian in April 2005. He returned to Meridian in 2009 to be an instructor pilot before learning he was accepted by the Blue Angels in September 2010.

The Blue Angles perform what is known as key influencer rides the week of air shows. Two community members along with one media representative are selected through a very extensive health and career evaluation process. The purpose of the rides is for the key influencers to go back and share their experience and what they learn about the U.S. Navy with others.

Tickle said it was his job to make sure the riders enjoyed their time in the air.

"They all did great up there," Tickle said. "Had one who got a little sick but he handled it just fine."

Long said his ride was a thousand times better than he could have imagined.

"I am drained physically," Long said. "It is really demanding on your body, especially if you are out of shape like I am."

The three riders and their alternates met early Wednesday at the base and were examined by one of NAS Meridian's own doctors. Then they sat down with Travis Simpson, the crew chief for Blue Angel #7. Simpson went over the rules of the ride, what to touch and more importantly, what not to touch.

Each rider took their turn climbing the small metal ladder into the F/A-18 Hornet. Lt. Tickle personally spoke to each rider and explained what he would do in the air. The flights lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

Reynerson was the second rider and watched as Long and Tickle moved out to the runway.

"I've never flown in a jet before so this is really going to be something new for me," he said. "If I get sick, then I get sick."

Dupre' was the last rider to experience the thrill.

"The very first move is an awesome feeling," said Dupre', who earned high marks for pulling 7.5 Gs without passing out. "But then again the entire flight was awesome. I'd do it again. Well, not right now because my legs feel like jello."