

## **RCSD senior takes to skies for class project**

### **Justin Murphy**

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With only a month remaining before he graduated from high school, Jorge Rodriguez still hadn't managed to obtain his driving license.

He barely had his permit, in fact, and still had never actually driven a car. As a result, he needed to find a ride out to the Canandaigua Airport for his first flying lesson.

"I flew a plane before I drove a car," he reflected. "I don't think that's normal."

It isn't. Rodriguez, a soft-spoken 12th-grader at Integrated Arts and Technology High School in Rochester, quietly carved out a unique path on his way to enlisting in the U.S. Air Force.

Brian Moore, a veteran pilot who took Rodriguez up in the air for the first time in a 1947 Piper Cub two-seater, said it's been years since a high school student sought out flying lessons even before graduation.

"He's a sharp young guy; I look forward to having him in the industry," Moore said. "We need people like him. ... He impressed me, and I'm not easy to impress."

Rodriguez's budding career in the air grew out of an assignment in his participation in government class. Most students settle for a community service project or interview with a professional in a possible career, teacher Melinda Caparco said. Rodriguez set his sights higher.

Through a partnership the school has with the Victor-Farmington Rotary Club, Rodriguez was put in touch with Moore for his inaugural trip. He now is working with another flight instructor, beginning to accumulate the hours he'll need for a professional license.

"He's a very quiet young man who has found his passion and now is driven by it," Caparco said. "I've known him for six years and I've never seen him smile so much or be so passionate about something."

There is a national shortage of pilots, in part because training is long and expensive. Enlisting in the Air Force will give Rodriguez a head start and the best possible instruction, Moore said.

"I don't think as many young people pursue it as could, actual-ly," he said. "That's why I'm actually enthusiastic about young people like him joining in. ... Jorge was introspective, with a real desire to learn something. He was a sponge."

Rodriguez said he always had been fascinated by flight, though he's not sure why. He'll need a ride to his graduation ceremony Wednesday — but only because he's shooting for a higher trajectory.

"Just the idea of being thousands of feet in the air," he said. "When you look down, it's beautiful."

*JMURPHY7@Gannett.com*



Jorge Rodriguez before taking off at the Canandaigua Airport. PROVIDED PHOTO

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