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STAFF PHOTO BY SAM WOLFE

The plane "Portraits of Hope" flies over the crowd during the second day of the First Flight Centennial Saturday afternoon.

Plane flies skies of hope for sick kids

Flowers painted by sick kids cover DC-3

By **BRENDA KLEMAN**
Correspondent

KILL DEVIL HILLS — Many types of aircraft took part in the First Flight Centennial airshow Saturday. One of them, a DC-3 painted in an array of brightly colored flowers, stood

out because of its unusual artwork but also because of who was responsible for it.

The brightly-colored flowers for "Garden of Transit-AIRborne" were painted by 2,000 seriously ill children.

The idea for the flowered plane came from members of the non-profit charitable organization Portraits of Hope, in conjunction with NASA and

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PLANE

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the N.C. Department of Transportation. The art design was specifically made for the First Flight Centennial event.

Portraits of Hope founder Ed Massey said NASA took an interest in the project after seeing an interview he did on the Rosie O'Donnell Show. He added that discussions for the project went on for about two years.

"As far as we know, it is the only plane specifically designed for this event," he said.

The organization used a six-pointed flower design on the airplane because it universally represents joy, hope, and inspiration.

Massey said Portraits of Hope tries to bring creative therapy into the lives of

sick children around the world. For the First Flight Centennial project, members of the organization went to hospitals with outlines of the flowers drawn on large self-adhesive panels. Children, many suffering from all types of serious illnesses including cancer, leukemia, HIV and burn victims, were given the flowers to paint.

"Many of these children are fighting horrendous pain, but while they are working on the project they smile again," Massey said.

Portraits of Hope used specially-designed paintbrushes and tools to help the physically challenged children better manipulate them as they painted the flowers.

"These are often children who cannot engage in activities that other children take for granted," said Massey.

Unfortunately, many of the children who participated in the project are no longer alive,

but Massey said the plane's part in the Wright event would bring pride and fond memories to the children's family members.

"We may be the slowest plane, but this exhibition will be a fantastic, worldly event with all eyes focused on the vibrant colors."

The 10,000 square-foot plane of brightly painted surface will also be among a hundred aircraft participating in a special centennial ceremonial fly-by

on Dec. 17.

As for future projects, Massey says he's in negotiations with Mayor Bloomberg, of New York City, to have the flowers painted on the tops of taxicabs.

"It serves to inspire the public at large and is a shining reminder to all of the adversity the youngsters live with, while highlighting their ability to accomplish marvelous masterpieces despite their hardships," he said.