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## Supercar to race plane at Operation SAFEE flight event

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DANIEL BOCK / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Devon Gardner, 16, a student in the Build and Soar summer and afterschool academy, helps assemble an ultra-high-performance car at Opa-locka Executive Airport, Friday, April 16, 2013. Barrington Irving, the youngest person and first black man to fly solo around the world, will race the car against a Learjet 31 on Friday.

A team of 30 Miami-Dade County students built a 200-mph supercar from scratch that will race a jet plane at Opa-locka Airport on May 3. The race, a challenge presented to them by their instructor, Barrington Irving, is a featured presentation at the second annual South Florida Aviation Fly-in and Educational Expo, or Operation SAFEE Flight.

Irving, who was once the youngest person and only black person to pilot a plane around the world solo, will race the car built by the students. He challenged the students — who are a part of his Experience Aviation summer program — to build the car so they would be able to apply lessons that they've learned in math and science.

“It’s engaging, it’s motivating, it’s inspiring, and it’s a real tangible thing they can physically see,” Irving said.

The students completed the car within nine months in a project that began last summer. Students, some of whom were as young as 8, worked on the car at the Orion Jet Center — a space donated to the program — at Opa-locka Airport.

Experience Aviation is a STEM program (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) designed to expose students to a possible career in aviation and engineering. Irving said that most students in his program had improved grades due to their real-world application of math, science and technology.

“The problem with schools is that there are more than enough resources in the community to expose kids to math and science,” Irving said of his approach to teaching the subjects. “The problem is we are not doing enough to engage kids in math and science.”

Irving is hoping that the May 3 race will help garner more support for the nonprofit organization, Experience Aviation, and programs like it. He hopes that more students in South Florida will gain an interest in engineering, math and science.

Irving said the students are excited to see the fruits of their labor at the expo, which was organized by Irving's mentor, Darrell Roberts.

Roberts said a high school tour of the Federal Aviation Administration's Miami center sparked a passion to work in the field. He is now the technical operation service manager for the FAA's Miami center and said he wants to give students from underprivileged areas a chance to learn about the field.

"If you can see it, you can do it," Roberts said about having exposure to different careers early in life.

Roberts said that this event is something he dreamed of having for more than ten years and is pleased to see how much the event has grown since its inception last year.

The event saw 2,000 students in attendance last year, and this year, Roberts hopes the number will increase.

The expo is a two-day event happening May 3 and 4. On Friday, students can attend various workshops and classes, as well as see Irving's race against the jet. High school students, who attend courses on Friday, will receive community hours. College and technical students will receive credit for wings-accredited courses through the FAA's flight-standards association.

Saturday has a more family-friendly atmosphere that will feature fly-ins and aircraft displays.

Roberts hopes to build a relationship with the city of Opa-locka to allow students to use the resources at the Opa-locka Airport to learn about careers in aviation.

"There's a shortage of skilled aviation employees over the next 15 to 20 years," Roberts said. "The country is falling behind in STEM. This is another way to bring those things to the forefront."