

Pilot pushes pursuit of science education

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Barrington Irving had no choice. Despite not having a working weather radar in his single-man Cessna, he had to fly straight into the coming sandstorm to cross [Saudi Arabia](#).

The pilot -- then 23 -- said he didn't know if he was going to make it.

But Irving braved the blinding storm on his flight from Luxor, [Egypt](#) to [Dubai](#), one of many adventures he experienced in 2007, when he became -- according to [Guinness World Records](#) -- the youngest and first

black pilot to fly solo around the globe.

"Something you start -- you have to finish," said Irving, 28, who grew up in [Miami](#).

The aviator spoke Wednesday to about 200 people at the Cradle of Aviation Museum in [Garden City](#), chronicling his record-breaking flight and urging students to concentrate on math and science learning.

Yesterday's event was part of Irving's Dream & Soar initiative, a nationwide, [Mitsubishi](#)-sponsored speaking tour through which he has promoted aviation education to nearly 10,000 students.

"His [Irving's] adventures aren't just about aviation," said Mitch Morimoto, president and chief executive of [Mitsubishi Heavy Industries America](#). "We all should continue to be students -- even when we graduate from school."

Born in [Kingston](#), Jamaica, Irving turned down a scholarship to play fullback at the [University of Florida](#). He studied aeronautical science at Florida Memorial University, setting his sights on flight.

After 2 1/2 years of fundraising, Irving -- then a senior in college -- began his round-the-world flight from [Miami](#) with "\$30 in my pocket," he said.



The 97-day, nearly 27,000-mile trip took him to 13 countries.

"I was most scared of falling asleep," Irving said. "I'd hand-fly the airplane and eat a lot of sunflower seeds."

Incoming freshmen to the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Magnet Academy in [Uniondale](#) attended the event, a preview of the coming year's daily, hands-on classes at the museum.

For Dave Lacroix, a 15-year-old sophomore in the program, Irving is an inspiration. The [Westbury](#) native said he's interested in medicine or biomedical engineering because he likes a challenge and wants to help people.

"It gives me hope that I can do something that great," Lacroix said after Irving's speech. "He overcame so much."

Irving -- partnering with [NASA](#) and [National Geographic](#) for another round-the-globe flight in 2013 -- said that in high school, he didn't think he was even smart enough to fly.

"You have to believe," he said.

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