



## ALLEGHENY



# Small plane's around-the-world flight to begin in Pittsburgh



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Pilot Ross Edmondson stands next to the 1981 single engine Cessna he plans to fly around the world. He departs from Pittsburgh on May 6.

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### 4-QUESTION TRIB POLL

If I ever needed to inquire about a small business loan, I would most likely...

- call a bank or lender
- walk into a bank or lender
- research and apply for the loan online

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When British-born Ross Edmondson decided to take on the challenge of flying around the world in a single-engine aircraft, he decided the best place to start the journey was Pittsburgh.

Edmondson, 35, a natural gas project engineer for Shell Oil Co., moved to Pittsburgh in 2012 when the company transferred him from the Netherlands.

"I really love the city," Edmondson said. "I had a wonderful time there and made a lot of great friends and kept in touch with all the flying club members in Zelienople, which is the airport I'm based at."

Edmondson became a member of Zelienople's Condor Aero Club, which is where he keeps his 1981 Cessna.

Two years ago, he was transferred to Iraq, where he works one month on and one month off. In his time off, he often travels back to Pittsburgh and the Zelienople Municipal Airport, where his aircraft is maintained by his mechanic.

He will depart from that airport May 6 in his effort to become one of only 200 small aircraft pilots to fly around the world.

Edmondson plans to make it back to Pittsburgh by April 22, 2020. That's assuming he is able to avoid a potential disaster.

"Ever since I learned to fly, I've had trips I wanted to take or adventures," said Edmondson. "One was to fly across the U.S. The second was to fly the length of Africa, because that's a continent I'd never seen anything of, and then the final one was to fly around the world. It's the ultimate challenge that you can do for a small aircraft. There's not a lot further you can go than all the way around the world. It's something I've always dreamed of doing."

Wiley Post became the first man to fly solo around the world in 1933. He flew 15,596 miles in 7 days, 18 hours and 49 minutes. Edmondson will cover more than 40,000 miles, flying six one-month periods over the course of a year, the on again, off again schedule necessitated by his need to hold down a job.

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But why will Edmondson cover nearly three times the distance that Post did?

“I’m basically taking a much more circuitous route,” Edmondson said. “The Earth at the equator is about 24,000 miles if you do a full circumnavigation in a straight line. If you just kind of go around the northern hemisphere a little way up then, of course, it would be shorter. But I’m planning to meander around a bit to the different countries.”

He’ll also be raising money and awareness for an old friend’s charity, African Promise. The charity currently supports seven schools in rural Kenya, serving more than 2,500 disadvantaged children, by upgrading infrastructure and funding the salaries of extra teachers.

“It’s something that I think can create a real long-term difference in Africa,” Edmondson said. “The way that they support the schools is with a very long-term mindset of actually improving the facilities and providing additional teachers.”

Edmondson said he’s looking forward to the adventure but is well aware of the many challenges he faces. For starters, small aircraft are very rare in most of the world and getting clearances to fly through many countries is a formidable challenge.

Edmondson will be flying at a speed of 150 mph (large commercial jets do about 500 mph) at an altitude of between 2,000 and 12,000 feet. This means he’ll be exposed to more extreme weather conditions in many of the regions he plans to fly through.

“The available flight information is very limited, especially in terms of en route weather, so it will be a constant challenge to avoid dangers such as thunderstorms,” said Edmondson.

Some of the flights will be lengthy. From New Zealand to California, for example, he’ll have to island hop over long stretches with nowhere to land. The longest leg is 2,400 miles from Hawaii to California, which is expected to take about 17 hours.

“I will have to take off 10% over the aircraft’s usual weight in order to hold the extra fuel required and spend the next 17 hours over water and far from anywhere to land in case of emergency.”

Edmondson went through emergency ditching training in case he needs to land in the water.

“There are places that have a simulated aircraft inside on a big crane and then you strap into it, just like you were flying normally,” said Edmondson. “And then it crashes down into a pool, and it will rotate or flip upside down and then you practice escape.”

To support Ross’s challenge, visit [justgiving.com/round-the-world](http://justgiving.com/round-the-world).

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