

Global Odyssey will be a technological marvel

By Mark Pavilons

The crunch is on with a little more than a week remaining before the historic 150 Global Odyssey lifts off.

This adventure will set new records in many respects, not the least of which involve technological navigation and communications systems.

King Township resident Steven Dengler and his father Bob have created the C150 Global Odyssey (C150GO). It will be the world's first Canadian around-the-world helicopter flight, and the first-ever father-son global circumnavigation by any light aircraft.

In celebration of Canada's 150th anniversary, the Canadian crew comprised of Bob, Steven, and helicopter ace Rob Dugal MacDuff will fly a Canadian-made Bell 429 helicopter more than 38,000 kilometres in just over one month.

Starting in Ottawa July 1 and zigzagging the globe, the crew will visit more than 100 airports in 14 countries. Along the way, they will be joined by notable Canadians such as astronaut Dave Williams and hockey legend Guy Lafleur.

Dengler's mind is racing as fast as those chopper blades, in anticipation of the launch.

This ultimate father-and-son road trip will also boast several technological firsts in modern aviation.

Major sponsor Honeywell has supplied an innovative Aspire 200 unit that will be tested and evaluated on a Bell 429 for the first time. It is the first broadband Internet communication system for a helicopter. This system has virtually eliminated the minute signal delay caused by the rotating blades, resulting in near-perfect, real time communications.

The Bell 429 Global Ranger is a military grade helicopter, used by many search and rescue organizations. Such a fool-proof communications system would be extremely valuable. "Imagine the possibilities," Dengler said. The system will be tested during the journey.

As well, providing unlimited satellite service is Inmarsat, the industry leader and pioneer of mobile satellite communications.

The amount of interest and support in this landmark adventure is simply "amazing."

Dengler is quite excited about the trip, adding it's been a ton of work. There have been mountains of paperwork, including permits, documents and obtaining permission from several foreign countries and governments.

One of the most interesting parts of the journey will be the long trek through Russia. They've spent more than a year working with Russian officials and will have a Russian navigator with them during this leg of the trip. Their contact in Russia did say this is a "dream trip through the most beautiful part of Russia."

Dengler is looking forward to a stop at the Maple Leaf, a popular pub in London, England that's a home base for Canadian ex-patriots.

He's also looking forward to hopefully stopping at two French war memorials - Vimy Ridge and the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial.

There are a ton of interesting landmarks along the way, including many in Canada such as the Confederation Bridge, Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site in Baddeck, Nova Scotia, and Signal Hill National Historic Site in St. John's, Newfoundland.

As a Canadian, Dengler can't wait to see all of these wonderful parts of our nation's history, and document them for all to see. All Canadians can join them by following C150GO on social media starting July 1.

The entire trip will be documented via video and still photography, as well as social media. Also travelling with the crew will be renowned Canadian photographer Peter Bregg, who has captured life over his 50-year career. Bregg received the Order of Canada in 2016 and during his career has travelled to more than 70 countries as a photojournalist. He's covered eight Olympic Games, the Iran hostage crisis, the Vietnam War, and the 9/11 attacks. He has photographed monarchs, celebrities, presidents and prime ministers, including serving as official photographer to Brian Mulroney in 1984-85.

Dengler envisions the result will be a coffee table book, if not other forms of imagery. Steven has already been booked for speaking engagements after the trek.

The team's inaugural stop (and official sendoff) will be the Canadian Aviation and Space Museum in Ottawa.

Crew flight suits, documents and memorabilia will all be donated for a special display at the museum.

The team lifts off from Bolton's National Helicopters July 1, heading to Ottawa for Canada Day celebrations that day.

From there, they head up the coast to Baffin Island, then off to Greenland and Iceland. The route goes from west to east to take advantage of the prevailing winds and Dengler pointed out a tail wind is always an advantage. The Bell 429 can comfortably travel 400 nautical miles at a time, and two legs of the journey push the envelope.

Two of the longest stretches run from Baffin Island to Greenland (392 NM) and Greenland to Iceland (400 NM).

Dengler stressed flying is not "simply sitting on your butt." "You have to constantly be aware of the airspace, monitor

communications, watch the instruments and track everything from temperature to wind speed. Weather is a major factor. But the in-cockpit technology will be a major bonus.

150GO is a registered Canadian not-for-profit organization supporting both the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation and True Patriot Love Foundation.

To learn more about the C150 Global Odyssey, to become a sponsor or to view the complete C150GO itinerary, visit www.c150go.ca