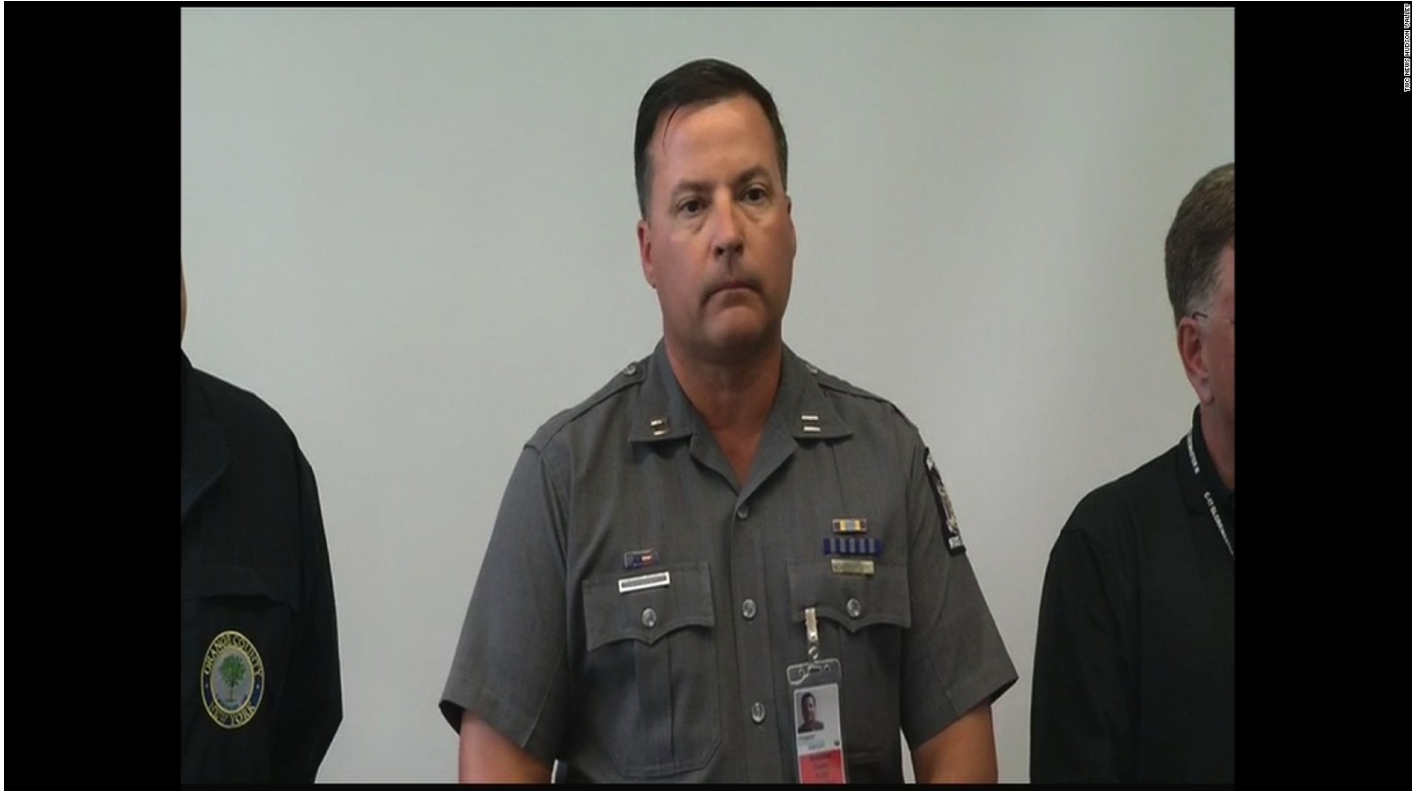




WITH HEAVY HEARTS, PILOTS PERFORM AT NY AIR SHOW AFTER DEATH

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The first-ever New York Air Show opened Saturday with a moment of silence and tributes to mark the death a day earlier of a Texas stunt pilot killed when he crashed during practice.

Daredevils spiraled, corkscrewed and rolled through sunny skies in New Windsor, about an hour north of New York City, the same day a National Transportation Safety Board investigator arrived to examine the death of stunt pilot Andrew Wright.

Pilot Mike Wiskus of Minneapolis said the maneuvers were safe despite the death of Wright, 53, an Austin, Texas, pilot whose single-engine plane crashed in a marshy area near Stewart International Airport.

"We put our lives on the line. We do," he said. "And it's not as risky as a lot of people think."

Wiskus said stunt flying is tightly regulated and pilots are always cognizant of safety.

"There are a lot of maneuvers I could do that would really blow people away, but I don't," he said. "I want to be sure the maneuvers I do will not put anybody in danger."

Wright was an expert and a pro, Wiskus said. He and the rest of the pilots were praying for his family, he added.

Wiskus opened the show in a plane trailing smoke that circled a West Point jump team descending to the ground with an American flag.

Larry Strain, an air show narrator, told the crowd Wright loved to fly.

"He loved the excitement, the thrill and adrenaline of aerobatics," Strain said.

He said Wright, a chief technology officer for a cyber-security company based in Toronto, had flown over 1,000 hours in his Giles 202 aircraft and had flown competitively and in shows since 2001.

Strain said Wright had hoped to break the Guinness Book of World Record of 81 maximum inverted flight spins.

"Our hearts go out to his wife Shireen, and all his family and friends," he said.

Cathy Bassett, a show spokeswoman, said performers Saturday dedicated their efforts to Wright and his family.

"Today's air show certainly will be flown with Andrew Wright in mind," she said.

A photographer and editor for the website nycaviation.com who captured images of the crash said it appeared the tail section of the plane was twisting off just before the crash. State police confirmed the aircraft had an apparent structural failure.

NTSB spokesman Keith Holloway said it was too early to know what caused the crash.

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SOURCE: AP

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