

AERO CLUB HISTORY

In 1986, Green Valley boasted more than 200 service, social and professional clubs. Except for airplane modelers, none of the clubs was tailored to residents who might have a consuming interest in aviation and space flight. Thus, three retired veterans of the aerospace industry founded the Aero Club of Green Valley, now named the Aero Club of Arizona, to fill what they had perceived as a real need.

It all started over coffee at Safeway in 1986. Bob Johnson, Jim Greenwood and Milt Getker each a conformed aviation buff, met there regularly to swap stories of their flying experiences. Soon other aviation industry retirees joined the "hangar sessions" until the group got so big it had to find a new location.

The eager flyers landed on Sunny's Restaurant, where the owner generously allowed them to transform his Teriyaki Room with pictures of airplanes and celebrated airmen. And on October 30, 1986, over lunch at Sunny's, Johnson, Greenwood, and Getker proposed that they form an Aero Club of Green Valley, if the others agreed it was a good idea. They did.

Having outgrown Sunny's except for board meetings, the brand new club, with Greenwood as President, conducted its first general meeting on November 19, 1987, at East Social Center. The Club's purpose: preserve America's aviation heritage, offer a vehicle for kindred

spirits to share their common interests and promote greater understanding of the history and future of human flight. Next the Club held its first annual membership meeting, which coincided with the second public forum, on January 17, 1988, also at the East Social Center. The main speaker was Col. Ralph D. "Hoot" Gibson, USAF (Ret), a Korean jet ace and former Air Force Thunderbird leader.

Since then, the Club has earned an enviable reputation for the quality of its informative and entertainment programs.

Programs are educational and feature a wide range of aerospace subjects from flight testing to flight safety.

Club membership is an impressive cross-section of people who either worked in some facet of the aerospace industry or simply have an affinity for flying machines.

It's a good rule of folks who have had professional careers in the armed forces flight training, aircraft manufacturing, air operations, aircraft services, federal regulatory agencies and commercial airlines. It also includes hard core aviation enthusiasts who never piloted an airplane.

Don Raymond, who succeeded Bob Johnson, was President when the Club became incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation

In February 1990, during Bill Lafferty's administration, the Club name officially changed to the Aero Club of Arizona (ACA).

Many Club members have contributed to ACA's steady growth and success such as Milt Getker, who served as the first secretary and at one time personally accounted for more than a third of the total membership. But none was more dedicated than Ginny de Silva whose efforts to maintain complete records and to communicate regularly with the membership literally held the Club together during its formative years.

Ginny replaced Getker as secretary. Upon the incapacitation of Mary Kay Maynard, the Club's first treasurer, she assumed the duties of treasurer as well. Before stepping down after nine years of active service, she also acted as statutory agent.

As such, she became embroiled in a three year battle with the IRS, which for reasons never fully explained, altered its position and declared ACA a "private foundation" subject to tax liability.

With some assistance from Greenwood, no stranger to government confrontation, Ginny finally won out. The IRS restored the club's tax exemption and ACA operations returned to normal. And wherever the feds meet for their morning coffee today, they probably will talk about the feisty little club in Arizona that beat the system.

Aviation observed a major milestone December 17, 2003, as the world celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the airplane's invention. An on that day in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, site of history's first flight, ACA was ably represented at the ceremonies commemorating Wilber and Orville's epic achievement.

Highlights of the memorable event, attended by aviation legends and dignitaries, including President George W. Bush, were reported to members.

Now as we move into the second century of powered flight, the ACA objectives remain the same, but its directors are looking ahead to further growth and service. Well aware of the realities of life in a retirement community, the board hopes to counter expected attrition by increasing membership through new activities having a common appeal to a broader audience in a wider area.

Monthly programs featuring prominent speakers have already replaced the original quarterly forum and are open to the general public. Members, of course are always encouraged to bring guests to the ACA's monthly meetings, currently held at the Friends-in-Deed. Also, the Club joins the local chapter of the Air Force Association for special tours and events in which there are mutual interests

Over the years ACA has supported a number of worthy causes related to aviation, especially those involving young people. And it will continue to do so as long as funds are available.

ACA currently supports four high school Junior ROTC programs

As for the organization's future, it continues to be bright as long as members have the dedication and imagination to make good things happen. After all, aviation is their passion.