

2014

The History of the Northeast Ohio Balloon Pilots Association

NOBPA



Northeast Ohio Balloon
Pilots Association

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The following is general information written to preserve the history of the Northeast Ohio Balloon Pilots Association. The data was collected by talking with balloonists about their memories of early ballooning in northeast Ohio and reading past newsletters and publications. This document is intended to be updated and revised as new information is available. Some facts used in the introduction were taken directly from a presentation given by Gayle Myers to the NOBPA membership sometime around 1985.

Preface

No one disputes the fact that Ed Yost is the first real pioneer in the development of hot air ballooning as we know it today. His interest and development of the modern hot air balloon system began as early as 1955 when he worked for General Mills and was under contract to build a hot air training balloon. There was a tethered flight of Ed Yost's prototype in 1956, which was after Ed had left General Mills, but the project engineer who was riding in the balloon vowed that he would never under any circumstances, make a free flight. Ed joined Raven Industries and after 'tinkering' around and completing a number of indoor static 'flights', the first modern hot air balloon was put in flight on October 22, 1960, in Bruning, Nebraska. The balloon was improved, redesigned, and went through a type certification program from 1966 to 1968. Earlier, in 1961, Don Piccard had joined Raven industries but had no part in the original development of Ed Yost's hot air balloon. Later Don Piccard left Raven and began manufacturing balloons himself.

Here in Ohio several people were becoming interested in hot air ballooning. Jim Contos of Akron had a history with gas balloons. In 1956 he inflated "Clarissa," an experimental certified hot air balloon. Details of Contos' operation of this balloon are sketchy, but he is known to have a great interest in lighter-than-air flight.

Two more pioneers are Dr. Christianson of the Cleveland Balloon Club and Dr. James Frey from Defiance. Dr. Christianson owned a 100,000 cubic foot Semco balloon that had no vent. Dr. Frey, from Defiance College, owned a Raven S50A, which was one of the first balloons ever sold by Raven for private use. Another adventurer was Dale Gates of the Cleveland Parachute Club in Garrettsville. Dale had a one-man AX-4 Piccard with a pie shape Velcro rip panel. These men entered the scene of hot air ballooning in Ohio between 1968 and 1970. There were also the Lesneak brothers from Akron who owned an S50 Raven, which they purchased from Denny Flodden in the early 1970s. They later moved out west.

I. Hot Air Ballooning Lifts Off in Northeast Ohio

Three pilots are mainly responsible for introducing hot air ballooning to northeastern Ohio. Their continued interest in balloon safety and education, led to the forming of the Northeast Ohio Balloon Pilots Association. Two of these individuals are Bob Zanella of Barberton, Ohio, and Arch Hawkins, formerly of Sebring, Ohio. Interestingly, they both learned about hot air ballooning in 1972 by watching the same television documentary. The third is Mike Emich, who was involved with gas ballooning as early as the late 1960s and with hot air balloons in 1971.

Bob Zanella



In the early 1970s Bob was a pharmacist at a Barberton Rexall drug store which he owned. Bev Sulzbach, worked at the drug store and has followed Bob through his many years of ballooning. Bob always had an interest in aviation. He was a fixed wing pilot and owned his own Cessna. Bob also had experience with parachute jumping. One evening, in 1972, he watched "The Alcoa Hour" which featured Bob Wallagunda flying a hot air balloon. The documentary portrayed Wallagunda as flying his balloon across the country, all in one flight. Zanella was fascinated with the hot air balloon and set out to get involved with this new sport. He could hardly wait until the next morning to tell his friend, John Reynolds. Little did Bob know, John had seen the same show and John too, was ready to try hot air ballooning. In fact, they agreed that day, to buy a balloon.

Early in 1972, three types of balloons were being built - Raven, Piccard and Semco. Bob made some calls for information and was impressed with the Semco. Mark Semick of Couer d'Alene, Idaho, offered this balloon with a 'pop top' while the other balloons were limited to Velcro tops. A pop-top would spring open when

triggered and allow a very quick deflation. Because of a sky diving accident which involved a long drag in a parachute, Bob insisted on a balloon that would deflate quickly. Together, Bob and John purchased a Model T Semco balloon. The balloon had no vent, a pop-top, wooden floor, an aluminum basket with canvas sides, two tanks and a squirrel cage blower. The new AX-6, N14431, was named Tortugas when Bob took delivery in July 1972. The cost of the system was \$2900. The new owners decided that Bob would get trained first, then he would train John. Bob arranged for flight lessons with Luther Taylor and flew his Cessna to Faison, North Carolina for training. After five training flights over three days, Bob was ready for his solo flight. As he prepared the balloon for his solo flight, Bob heard thunder in the distance and he cancelled the flight. Despite the fact that there was no flight, Luther went ahead and signed Bob off. Bob returned to Ohio where he did his solo flight.

Bob was ready for his flight check, but few examiners were around. He talked with Bob Sparks who put Zanella in touch with Fred Kissle, an examiner in New Jersey. Sparks arranged for Bob to meet with the examiner at a small balloon event held at an estate in Pennsylvania. The plan was for Mike Emich, 15 years old, to ride with Bob to the Pennsylvania event. Bob would drive all night while young Mike would help keep Bob awake. They arrived with no sleep, but Bob was ready to take his check flight. The examiner was not familiar with the Semco brand of balloon that Bob was flying so he didn't want to ride in the balloon with him. Bob was instructed to take off and follow the examiner, who was flying his own balloon. They planned to land at the same place. Amazingly this flight plan was successful. After Bob landed next to the examiner, he was told to get into the examiner's Raven balloon to complete the flight check. Bob was issued a license although at that time there was only one rating, not both private and commercial.

Bob's first student was his partner, John Reynolds. Although John took flight lessons, he never received a license. Bob's second student was Don Connors from Indiana. As of 2003, Don Connors was still flying. Bev Sulzbach, was Bob's third student and Bev received her license in October of 1973. She was licensed by Ken Hoskins who gave the flight exam by watching from the ground and giving flight instructions to Bev by radio. When she landed, Ken got into the balloon and told her to take him for a ride. From that, she assumed she had passed the flight check. Bev was the second woman

in Ohio to receive a balloon license. The first was Alice Jackson of



Columbus.

from Yankee Peddler, September, 1977

Bob Zanella and Bev Sulzbach launch



Bob and Bev dress in period attire for the Yankee Peddler flight.



Bev Sulzbach prepares her balloon for flight with John Wells on the left.

Another woman who became interested in ballooning in the early 1970s was Judy Huth. Judy and her husband Tom, began crewing for Bob in 1972. It only took one flight for Judy to decide she wanted to take lessons. Judy, Zanella's fourth student, received her license on October 28, 1974.



Front- Judy Huth in "Whisper" Back- John Wells in "Sunshine"

On January 24, 1976, Tom and Judy received delivery of their new balloon, Whisper, a Semco Challenger AX-7, N #65248. The orange, yellow and blue vertical striped balloon had a small vent, a wicker basket and two tanks. In addition to their ballooning interests, the Huths were also raising three young daughters. Monica, the youngest of the three, followed her mother's interest in piloting and became a balloon pilot in July 1989. We know her today as Monica Jonard.

By the fall of 1974, Bob had finished training Judy Huth, Mike Emich, John Wells, and Jim Sabo. In October of 1974, Bob became an examiner and issued licenses to those students he had recently trained, the first being Jim Sabo, of Rittman. Jim and his wife Judy purchased a red, white and blue Semco and proceeded to turn it into 'The Ohio Balloon'. The couple chose four symbols representing our state and applied three of them to their balloon. The process took a few years and many hours of labor. It was later designated the official balloon for the state of Ohio, by the Ohio legislature. A few years later, the Sabo's sold their balloon to Beckie Hogue who applied the fourth symbol to the balloon.



The "Ohio" Balloon with state symbols.



John Wells was also an early student of Zanella. John worked across the street from Bob's pharmacy and the two would frequently exchange stories about fixed wing flight. John Wells worked as crew while Bob trained John Reynolds and Wells soon found himself in love with the sport. Wells took lessons and received his license in October 1974. Soon afterward, John purchased an orange and yellow Semco N2040J, which he named Sunshine. By this time Zanella had purchased his second balloon, a Mark V Semco. John Wells went on to become the fourth president of NOBPA in 1983. Shortly after his presidency, John moved to California and sold his balloon to Beckie Hogue. When John was ready to start flying in California, he wanted to buy his balloon back from Beckie, but she had sold it to Dave Groupe who moved to Bennington, Vermont.



John Wells begins inflation with Tim Bennett at the mouth on New Year's Eve, 1982

Additionally, over the next few years, Bob and Bev continued to train many more balloonists, including David Witner, Bill Gerber, Carl Smith, Beckie Hogue, Kevin Zanella, Larry Smithers and Fred Muffet. As ballooning became more popular, balloons were used to promote festivals, fairs and for advertising.

Larry Smithers purchased a balloon after receiving his license in 1977. He is known for wearing a top hat when he flew.

Beckie Hogue was a middle school teacher with Kevin Zanella in her 8th grade English class. Kaz would frequently write stories about his father's balloon adventures. These writings intrigued Becky and soon she started crewing for Bob and Bev. Beckie bought the Ohio balloon from Jim and Judy Sabo and started training with Bob. By 1978, she was licensed and later she trained Sue Korosa, Tim Bennet and Missy Hansel (Midura). When the Ohio balloon was no longer air worthy, Beckie bought John Wells' Semco which she flew until 1984 when she sold it to Dave Groupe. Beckie continued to fly balloons until 1986.

Sue Korosa was also a teacher and started crewing for Beckie Hogue in 1978. Sue received her first lesson from Fred Muffet and the remainder of her training was from Beckie. Sue was licensed in 1981, and in 1982 she bought her first balloon, which was an Adams balloon which she had seen in flight at Battle Creek in 1981. It was purchased from Phil Thompson. Sue had never been in nor flown the balloon until she took delivery in the fall of 1982.



Sue Korosa prepares for her Private Pilot flight test with Bob Zanella August 24, 1981



Sue Korosa's "Halycon" during her Commercial Pilot flight test August 19, 1982

Fred Muffet became involved in ballooning in 1978. He had taken a helicopter ride over Niagara Falls and wanted to become a helicopter pilot. After doing some checking, he discovered that the cost involved in becoming a helicopter pilot would be prohibitive to his budget. About that same time, he saw Bob Zanella floating in his balloon over Barberton. Fred tracked him down and bought a ride. Fred was so delighted with his flight that he purchased a balloon from Bob while they were still in the air. During his first year of flying, Fred logged about 175 hours. In 1979, Fred attended the national balloon competition and was named "Rookie of the Year".



Fred Muffett flies with his reindeer during Christmas



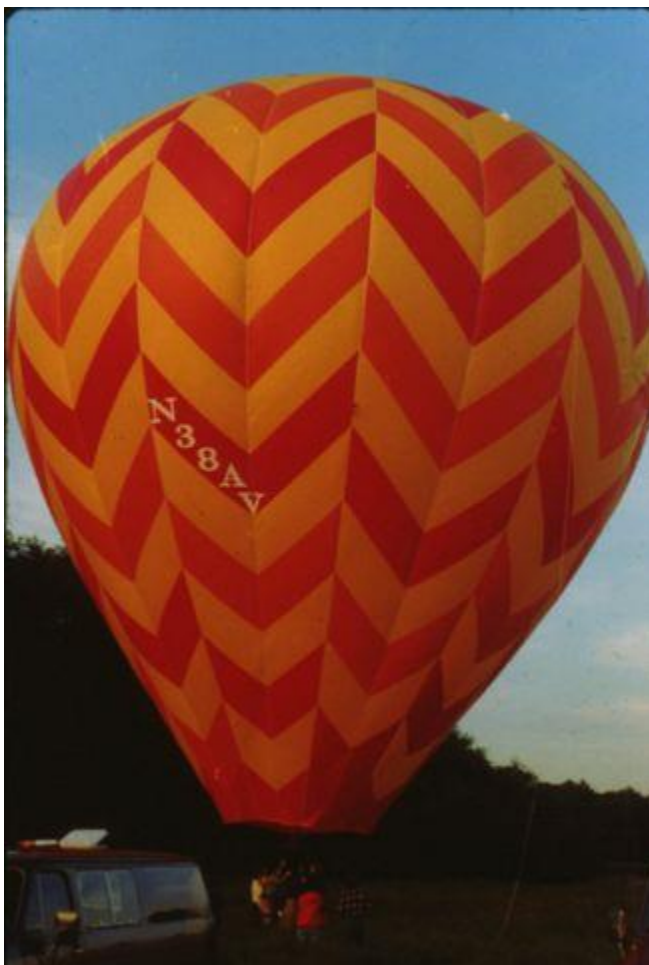
"Little Miss Muffett" was Fred's signature balloon.

The Balloon Club

'The Balloon Club' would never have existed without the Akron University continuing education class on ballooning. About 1979, Bob Zanella volunteered to teach a class on hot air ballooning for the continuing education department at the University of Akron. This class drew people with many different degrees of interest. For those with a true desire to participate, this class provided a hands on opportunity with balloons. As part of the class, Bob and Fred Muffet took several of the students for a balloon ride. They launched from Kent State University. Over the course of this class, Fred remembers giving first time balloon rides to John Hill and Denny Welser. Other participants in the class were Dick Rossen, his son Danny and Bill Martig.

Another one of the class participants was Todd Fisher who flew with Fred. Todd had an interest in balloons since his childhood when he read about Ed Yost in Popular Science magazines. Todd was very interested in pursuing his license but didn't have a balloon. He convinced several other members of Zanella's class to pool their money and purchase a balloon together. They would take turns flying while Bob would do the training. It was an economical way for several people to get training. Thus the 'Balloon Club of Akron' was started. The original six investors were Todd Fisher, Frank Bujorian, Joan Reisig, Tony Dockus, Bill Lewskowsky and Carl Walters. They each put in \$600 and ordered a new balloon from Bob. They named it 'Sunrise, Sunset'. (#10B Club Balloon) Bob covered the price difference with the hopes of finding four more people to buy into the club balloon. Todd was the first to complete his training with Bob. Todd

remembers that he was also the first to burn the club balloon and the first to 'stuff it in a tree'. In 1981, Todd purchased a Raven balloon from Bill Lauro and named it 'Kimberly's Rainbow'. For many years he ran a successful ride business. Todd Fisher served as the first president of the Akron Balloon Club and joined NOBPA in the early 1980s. Four of the other original members, Frank, Tony, Bill, and Carl all received training and a license through their investment with the club balloon. Joan Reisig was the only original member of the Balloon Club not to earn a license, but maintained an avid interest.



"Sunset, Sunrise" was the name given to this balloon owned by members of the Balloon Club.

Around 1980, the Balloon Club had four new members purchase shares. These were Gil and Anne Pryne and Marty & Pat Hess. They all earned licenses through the Akron Balloon Club.

Mike Emich

Mike Emich's adventures in aviation go as far back as the late 1960s when Mike would ride his bike to the Akron airport and get an airplane ride for 'a penny a pound'. Long before he was able to drive, he would go to the air dock and help inflate the blimps. At age 12, Mike was a member of the Wingfoot Lighter-Than-Air-Society. This group was made up of employees of Goodyear Tire and Rubber who had access to the company's gas balloons. They would use coal gas to fill the balloons for flight. Goodyear began to worry about the liability of the company when its' employees were using company balloons for fun flying. In 1969 this group of gas balloon flyers, broke away from the Wingfoot LTA club and formed a new group called National Lighter Than Air. This allowed them to do weekend fun flights without any association to the Goodyear company. The group included, Jim Contos, Fred Kissel, Roger Wolcott, Don Overs, Art Swanson, Ren Brown, Vincent Rubino, and others. After several years of gas balloon flying these pilots were eventually forced to turn to hot air ballooning because hydrogen and helium became expensive and hard to get. In 1971, the National Lighter Than Air Society purchased their own hot air balloon, an AX6 Piccard, N16US.

In 1971, Mike traveled to Lakehurst, New Jersey for the 50th anniversary of the naval air station. Here Mike took his first tether ride with Fred Kissel. Fred had a Raven 105 with a Piccard basket. Later that year, Mike rode with Fred Kissel, this time in free flight from Randolph to Ravenna. Mike was just 15 years old. Thus, in 1971 Mike Emich was the first future NOBPA member to take a flight in a hot air balloon.

The following pictures are all taken in August – October 1971. The first photo shows Mike with Jim contos at the LTA Society annual picnic at Friendship Acres Park. They were getting ready to have the model hot-air balloon contest (that is the burner to the right). The next picture was a tether flight at the Akron Fulton airport next to the Goodyear fixed-wing hanger on Triplett Blvd. The man in the basket with Mike and Contos is Contos' son-in-law. The third photo is taken at the Lighter-Than-Air Society's annual banquet. Mike is talking with Tony Fairbanks and Ward T. Van Orman. Tony Fairbanks was an avid gas balloon pilot and an original member of the Cleveland Balloon Club founded in 1932. He flew gas balloons in the early US Nationals and made at least 6 flights over the Swiss Alps. Tony and Don Piccard formed the Balloon Club of America in Philadelphia, in 1952. Several years later, in 1961, the Balloon Club of America (Philadelphia) and the National Lighter-Than-Air Society (Akron) formed the Balloon Federation of America. This came about during a meeting of both clubs in Don Over's garage in Pittsburgh, Pa. Don Overs was Emich's early hot air and later gas balloon instructor. Ward T. Van Orman was a gas balloon pilot beginning in 1918 and won nine first place honors while competing in US Nationals and Gordon Bennett cup races. The picture was taken as he autographed a photo for Mike.

It is interesting to note, the Balloon Federation of America, which so many current hot air balloon pilots are associated with today, was originally formed from two gas Balloon Clubs, one of them originating in Akron.



Mike Emich and Jim Contos at Friendship Acres, 1971



Mike Emich and Jim Contos tether at Fulton Airport, 1971



The Lighter-Than-Air Society Banquet, 1971
Mike Emich, Wart T. VanOrman and Tony Fairbanks

In 1972, Mike met Bob Zanella, although neither of them remembers exactly where or how. Most likely Bob looked into the Balloon Flyers of Akron club when he first became interested in hot air ballooning. In 1972, Mike accompanied Zanella to Pennsylvania for Bob's check ride.

Sometime in 1973, a small group of hot air balloons gathered at Friendship Acres, a camp ground in Randolph. This group included Jim Contos, Fred Kissel, and the Balloon Flyers of Akron with their club balloon, Arch Hawkins, and Larry Lesneak. Mike met Arch Hawkins here. After this, Arch also contributed to Mike's balloon training. Mike liked to participate with any and all pilots. He did not limit himself to one person or group. Through these different people he gained knowledge, experience and training from several pilots.

Mike received his hot air balloon license in June, 1974. From there, he proceeded to build his first balloon. The AX3, 21000 cubic feet tyvec balloon was flown with an aluminum frame seat with two tanks attached to the back, and used an inverted dump deflation system. As the material was all white, Mike named it Casper. Later in 1979, he built another AX3 from polyester fabric. This balloon had a rip panel and a hand woven basket, which would hold one or two 10 gallon tanks. This picture was taken in November, 1982, when Mike attempted to break the world record for distance. He flew 34 miles which was one mile short of the record. Mike is also licensed to fly gas balloons, fixed wing, and turbo prop planes. In 1986, he was awarded the Shields-Trauger award from the Balloon Federation of America, which is the highest award given by the BFA. He also holds numerous aviation world records, several of which have been sanctioned by the NAA in Washington D.C.



"Casper"

Mike Emich in



In November 1982, Mike flies "Muffin" another homebuild in an attempt to break the world distance record.

Arch Hawkins

Arch and his brother John became interested in hot air balloons after watching Bob Wallagunda's TV documentary, the same way Bob Zanella had learned about balloons. Arch and John went to Statesville, North Carolina where John trained with Bill Meadows. John took his flight test in Columbus, Ohio, in May, 1972 and then trained Arch. When the brothers were ready to order a balloon, they traveled to Valparaiso, Indiana to meet with Don Piccard. Here they ordered an AX-6 Piccard which was delivered in July 1, 1972. The balloon was 55,000 cubic feet with a pie velcro rip panel. The red, white and blue balloon was named 'Treasure Island'. Just one month later, they participated in the balloon nationals held in Indianola, Iowa, where John took 10th place. Arch continued his training and was issued a license on September 20, 1972. During his flight exam, the FAA representative chose to stay on the ground and watch Arch fly. John continued to fly for many years for fun and recreation. Arch, however, expanded his ballooning interests to include extensive student training, commercial balloon sales, passenger rides, and even some engineering and designing of balloons. Arch always stressed safety and education so it was no surprise that he was the pilot who first brought the northeastern Ohio balloonists together to start a club. During the last 30 years, Arch has trained more than 35 pilots, flown more than 12,000 passengers, and has over 3000 pilot hours without an accident. He is currently flying passengers in Palm Springs, California and builds authentic balloon trophies for balloon races.

Arch was instrumental in contributing to the early growth of ballooning by training Beth Davidson and Bill Lauro, and by helping to train Mike Emich and Pete Hawkins, all of these prior to 1980. Soon after NOBPA was formed, Arch trained Dick Rossen, Rick Jerkovich, Chuck Thompson and Gary Gerberich who were active in early NOBPA. Arch also trained Beth Davidson.

Beth Davidson

Beth Davidson first became interested in ballooning in 1976 when she lived in Denver. She crewed for balloons in Colorado for a short time before returning to Ohio where she received training from Arch, bought a balloon, and earned her license in September of 1977. Her first balloon was named 'Passion Flower'. (#16) By the summer of 1978, Beth was a commercial pilot and attending flying events in Ohio, Michigan, and the Nationals in Indianola. Her crew chief was George Green who continued to fly with her until he and his wife Nancy bought their own balloon in 1988. Beth started training her sister, Ann Davidson, who received her private license in September of 1981. Later that year Ann and Jan Nicole went together and bought a new Barnes balloon. Beth also trained Maury Sullivan in 1982 and helped train Steve Dale, Bill Lavigna, Penny & Paul Suttle. She was also instrumental in starting the HOF Balloon Classic in 1986.



Left- One of Arch Hawkin's many balloons, this one a 56,000 cu ft. Barnes Balloon

Right: Beth Davidson in "Passion Flower", a 77,000 cu ft. Barnes Balloon

Bill Lauro got started in ballooning when working for Dale Haggarty who owned a commercial advertising balloon. Dale suggested that Bill, a fixed wing pilot, start flying the company balloon. Bill received his balloon endorsement after having instruction from both Arch Hawkins and Ken Austin. After a short time of flying with Haggarty, Bill signed a contract to fly the Canada Dry Balloon. Bill remembers being forced to fly in the city for the advertising benefits. Usually, balloons flew in sparsely populated areas. Bill took his check ride with Bob Zanella in 1977. He soon bought his own balloon, a Raven named 'Midnight Flower' and started doing advertising. (#17) Bill was

an FAA Designated Examiner and trained several NOBPA members including Nancy Honeyman and Carol Weiner.



Bill Lauro's Raven "Midnight Flower"

Pete Hawkins

Pete Hawkins was the third Hawkins brother to earn a balloon license. With his two older brothers flying it was only a matter of time until he followed their lead. Pete took the written balloon test in 1973 but failed the test. Discouraged, he wasn't interested in getting a license for a few years. In 1976, Pete took the written test again and passed. By this time, John had taken delivery on a new Barnes balloon, which he named Fig Newton. Arch had two Barnes balloons, so there was always a balloon available for Pete to fly. Pete trained with John and in late 1978, he bought his own balloon, a 56,000 cubic foot Raven balloon named "Skyhawk". Pete soloed in this balloon and received his license in early 1979. Pete was the first student for Bill Lauro to license when he became a new FAA Designated Flight Examiner. Pete continued to build hours and received his commercial license in October 1979.

In 1981, Pete trained Cliff Cowen, who would become president of NOBPA in 1986 and 1987. Pete spent several winters in California doing passenger rides with Arch. He returned to Ohio for the summer and flew passengers for Unlimited Ballooning Adventures. He has over 1300 hours of safe flying.

Gary Klein, ED Lappies and Bill Armstrong

While many of NOBPA's original members have been discussed, a few others also played an important role in the formation of NOBPA. In order to have a clear picture of how Nobpa was formed, it is important to understand how and when some of these pilots each came into ballooning. These pilots are Gary Klein, Bill Armstrong, and Ed Lappies. All these aeronauts had roots in the sport long before NOBPA was actually formed.

Gary Klein was an advertising manager with Diamond Shamrock Corporation in 1974. The company owned a Raven s-55 that was used for promotional and civic events. Gary was good friends with the manager who was in charge of the balloon program. The manager was in the process of ordering a new system, and looking for a pilot to help manage the balloon program. The balloon program was strictly an extra hours activity and had nothing to do with Gary's regular advertising position. Gary felt this was a good way to have some fun and learn a new skill; plus he found he really enjoyed flying. Gary was trained by Ed Yost and received his license in June, 1975. For many years, Gary had the opportunity to fly and learn from some of the most well-known pilots in the sport. Gary remembers this as a time when he was able to fly in the US, Canada, and parts of Europe. He used first class equipment but someone else paid for it. In 1982, when Diamond Shamrock ended their balloon program, Gary bought the equipment for himself and continued to fly for a few more years. Gary was the first president of NOBPA.

Ed Lappies became interested in hot air ballooning in 1970. He was living in Cleveland at the time and contacted the Cleveland Balloon Club. He found the club was selling their Semco balloon for \$10,000, but Ed thought that was too much to pay. Ed then contacted Denny Flodden at Raven industries where he purchased an all black Raven for \$9000. As part of the deal, Denny Flodden agreed to train Ed to fly balloons. Ed had two lessons totaling 2 ¾ hours of flight training when he was signed off to solo. It's no wonder Ed remembers wearing knee pads, elbow pads and a helmet when he flew. Ed had introduced his friend, Bob Carter, to hot air ballooning also and together they practiced flying, frequently referring to the flight manual. According to Ed, Bob Carter is still flying balloons, but never acquired a license. Ed was issued a license in 1970. In 1972, he attended the first Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta with Denny Flodden. There were 15 balloons participating. Ed Lappies was instrumental in forming NOBPA and served as Vice President in 1980. Soon afterwards, Ed and his wife to be, Mariann, moved to New Hampshire. Ed continued to fly balloons accumulating over 3200 hours and serving as an FAA Designated Flight Examiner. Ed Lappies passed away in January, 2004. (#18)

Bill Armstrong's involvement with aviation dates back to 1961 when he and a neighborhood friend built a miniature capsule attached to a weather balloon. The balloon was designed to ascend to 750 feet where the capsule would release and float back to the ground with the help of three smaller balloons. Although unsuccessful on the first attempt, Bill did succeed on the second launch. Later when he was a high school student Bill would hitch hike to "work parties" at the Wingfoot Air Dock. Here he patched gas balloons and did sewing repairs on the nets to earn points toward a balloon ride. Although Bill worked many hours, he never received his ride. Bill got a student license at 17, and became a licensed hot air balloon pilot in 1974. He was trained by Tom Gotch and Clayton Thomas and flew at the first World Hot Air Balloon Championships at Albuquerque in 1973. Later, in 1983, Bill and Mike Emich both earned their gas ratings from Don Overs. Bill and Mike flew gas balloons together frequently, including a flight in 1985 which set a U.S. distance record. They flew 515 miles, from Akron to Boston, in a 19,000 cubic foot hydrogen gas balloon. In addition to being a founder and director of NOBPA, Bill has been active in the Balloon Federation of America, the Lighter-Than-Air Society, Balloon Flyers of Akron and several other prominent balloon organizations. Bill was awarded the BFA's Shields-Trauger memorial award in 1986, which is the highest award in American ballooning.



A group of balloonist discuss the evenings flight. Left to right, Gary Klein, Bob Zanella (back), Arch Hawkins, Ed Lappies and (unidentified). This picture may have been taken at Ravenna Balloon A-Fair about 1980.

II. NOBPA IS ESTABLISHED

Organizational meetings

Now that interest in ballooning was growing in northeast Ohio, education and exchange of information and ideas between balloonists became very important to the development of ballooning. Arch Hawkins had always believed education and safety were vital to the continued growth of the sport.

On **January 20, 1980**, Arch Hawkins invited balloon enthusiasts from northeastern Ohio to an organizational meeting for the purpose of promoting balloon safety and education. The gathering was held in Sebring, Ohio, and was the first organized meeting of what was to become NOBPA. Little did Arch know, this would grow to be one of the premier balloon clubs in America. Those in attendance that day included Arch Hawkins, John Hawkins, Gary Klein, Bill Armstrong, Bob Zanella, Bev Sulzbach, Mike Emich, Dick Rossen, Beth Davidson, Bill Lauro, Tom & Judy Huth, Ed Lappies and John Wells. There were others in attendance also, but at this point we can only rely on memory. At this meeting, Gary Klein was chosen as chairman of the planning committee.

February 3, 1980

Gary Klein led a meeting to establish the structure and organization of the club. This meeting was held in Hudson, but no one remembers exactly where. It was at a cabin like structure which was used for business meetings and planning sessions. The group discussed the constitution, by-laws, vision and mission statement for the club. Considerable time was spent discussing how the club should be structured, especially the different levels of membership. Eventually, a proposed constitution and by-laws were drafted. It must have been at this meeting when the name "Northeast Ohio Balloon Pilots Association" was agreed upon.

February 24, 1980

Gary sent a letter announcing a general membership meeting to be held February 24, 1980, at Marti Realty on West Market Street, in Akron. Included with the meeting notification was a copy of the proposed constitution and by-laws. At this meeting the proposed constitution and by-laws were read, discussed and approved by the membership. The constitution allowed for three classes of membership, pilot, associate and general along with three levels of dues, \$20, 15, & 10. It is interesting to note,

during the first few meetings of NOBPA, there was much discussion about the different levels of membership and what privileges would be included in each. This topic would prove to be somewhat controversial for many years to come. At this meeting, the following were elected as officers and board members:

President: Gary Klein Vice President: Ed Lappies Secretary: Bill Armstrong Treasurer:
Bev Sulzbach Safety: Bob Zanella Directors: Arch Hawkins, Mike Emich, Bill Lauro, Bill
Gerber

March 9, 1980

The newly elected board held their first official board meeting on March 9, at Martig Realty, where all subsequent meetings were held for the next few years. Fortunately, the minutes of the meeting were very detailed and thus we have some interesting history recorded. First, it's interesting to note all nine board members were present for this meeting. Bev had already opened a checking account in the association's name and we had 16 pilot members and 8 associate members who had paid dues.

There was much discussion again about the category of "**general member**" and what benefits it would include. A lengthy discussion followed as to whether **general members** should be allowed or invited to attend business meetings, who should be considered **general members**, i.e. crew or landowners or should that category of membership be retained at all. Even though our new constitution had only been in effect for about two weeks, the board passed a motion to amend the constitution. The board decided article III, section C, should read "general members may attend general meetings only". The amendment was later voted and approved at a general membership meeting. Guidelines for the newsletter were finalized and Bill Lauro submitted several designs for a club logo. The board narrowed the choice to two, allowing the general membership to make the final decision at a later date. Arch Hawkins was appointed membership chair, Ed Lappies program chair and Bill Armstrong newsletter editor. The board discussed some issues that organizers should address when managing local rallies. Bill Lauro reported he was working with the Ravenna Balloon-A-Fair, which hoped to draw 50 balloons. A lottery was held to decide which six of the nine board members would hold office for either one or two year terms. It was decided general membership meetings would be held on the third Sunday of each month and the next meeting was scheduled for March 30.

March 30, 1980

At this point, the information about meetings gets scarce to almost non-existent. There was a membership meeting on March 30 when the membership chose a logo and this logo was used on the newsletter dated April 1980. There was a board meeting on April 13 and a membership meeting on April 20, but there are no records about these meetings.

The next recorded information is a newsletter dated August 1980. The newsletter refers to a meeting and fly out scheduled for Sunday August 17, at Sun Beau Valley Ranch in Ravenna. The meeting featured Bill Armstrong reporting on the Balloon Federation of America's national championship race and annual meeting, recently held in Indianola, Iowa. Bill was serving as Vice President of the Balloon Federation of America. It is important for us to remember some of our early members were also involved in ballooning on the national level. Two films were also shown at the club meeting, "Ballooning Over The Alps" and "Forbes Transcontinental Flight".

Membership update 1980 - During this year, Fred Muffet joined NOBPA along with other new members Sonia Haggerty, Barb Zodrow, Greg Ray, Frank Bujorian, Tony Dockus,

Tony Perry, Gayle & Ken Myers. Dick Rossen earned his private license in May. Ed Lappies moved out of state sometime in 1980.

1981

The Year of Re-organization

January

A short newsletter was sent to members that addressed the lack of correspondence and communication within the club. It defined some problems the club had experienced during the first year and asked the membership to "give us another chance to get our organization back on its feet". This letter had been sent by Arch Hawkins and further emphasizes his commitment to getting a club started. The club realized one problem was that meetings had previously been held on Sundays and often combined with a fly out. The club realized the need to separate the two and moved the regular meetings to weeknights. Another problem was the lack of newsletters and communication being sent on a regular basis. Remember, we didn't have e-mail. The next meeting was announced for January 21, at 7:00 pm but there is no report from that meeting.

February 1981

From this point on, we have regular monthly newsletters that do a good job of documenting the club's activities, although we don't have any official minutes from board or membership meetings. I have tried to summarize data from the newsletters and include some colorful comments from the club presidents.

Membership updates 1981

Dick Rosen, Tony Perry and Pat Murray earned commercial licenses. Private licenses were issued to Dave Witner, Pete Hawkins, Gary Tyo, Bob Brubaker, Ray Bryan, Ann Davidson, Pat Hess and Gil Pryne. New members included Larry Sampsel, Neil Brott, Art Singleton, Bob Magree and Bruce Silverton. Bill and Kathy Faust, Pat & Marty Hess and Joan Reisig, all members of The Balloon Club, joined. Rick Jerkovitz and Chuck Thompson joined as student pilots and bought new balloons. Bill and Kathy Faust, Ann Mayberry, Larry James, and Chuck Thompson purchased new balloons. Bill Lauro was certified as a designated flight examiner. In early 1981, the general membership meeting was moved to the second Tuesday of the month and that day was kept for many years. The meetings were generally held Martig Realty. At the March meeting, elections were held with the following results:

President – Fred Muffet

Vice President – Dick Rossen

Treasurer – Bev Sulzbach

Secretary – Bill Armstrong

Safety Officer – Bob Zanella Directors – Arch Hawkins, Bill Lauro, John Wells, Tony Dockus

Bob Zanella was scheduled to give a report on the Winter Carnival in St. Paul, Minn. and his attendance at the workshop for examiners and instructors. The program committee, chaired by Dick Rossen, planned for speakers to be educational and entertaining. Some of the topics during that year were crop identification, presented by the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster, NOBPA member Bill Maxwell reported on his accident in power lines and an attorney discussed trespassing laws. Other speakers included an insurance agent and Al Oliver from FSS. We had a presentation explaining rules for BFA sanction races, winter flying and toured the Cleveland flight service station. The newsletter editor was Sonia Haggarty and

Frank Bujorian published the document. The newsletter usually included an article introducing and reviewing our monthly programs and contained a few words about safety from Bob Zanella. Arch Hawkins wrote safety articles including several regarding the correct heating, pressure, refueling and care of propane tanks, the importance of drop lines and quick releases, and safety tips for launching large groups of balloons. One of his articles mentioned the dangers of heating propane tanks in the bathtub of your hotel room. Believe it or not, there was a time when more than one pilot hauled their tanks into the hotel to heat them in a tub of warm water.

Fortunately, heat tapes became the standard of heating and now nitrogen is most common. Other articles that year included a report about Ben Abruzzo attempting to cross the Pacific and Maxie Anderson planning to circle the globe. The May newsletter contained a lengthy article about the BFA petition to the FAA to increase the minimum hours needed for a private and commercial license and to add a flight instructor rating. In early 1981 NOBPA was incorporated as a non profit organization, we had club tee shirts for sale and our first banquet was being planned for January, 1982.

Flying events held that year included Aurorafest, Wadsworth, Marysville, Ravenna and National competition in Iowa. Additionally there was the Akron Expo and Homerville that were sanctioned events. Fred, Bill, Arch and Dick promoted FAA relations by giving several FAA personnel balloon rides. Fred Muffet completed two successful flights over Niagara Falls and wrote an extensive article about his experiences. Gayle Myers was becoming very active in the club and organized the tour of the Cleveland FSS. She supplied

information to pilots about obtaining topographical maps and encouraged us to be active in the LTA Society. Sonia initiated a contest to name our NOBPA newsletter.

January 1982

In January 1982, John Wells organized the first NOBPA banquet. It was held at Young's Restaurant and 70 people attended. John and Bill Lauro presented humorous awards to a few pilots who experienced embarrassing moments during the flying season. Here, the "Willie Awards" were started. Also at the banquet, Gayle Myers shared a slide presentation of her ballooning adventures in France. Sonia previously asked for ideas of names to use for the newsletter and 'DROP LINE' was appropriately chosen. The elections were held in February and the following members were elected:

President - Dick Rossen

Vice President – John Wells

Treasurer – Bev Sulzbach

Secretary – Gary Klein

Safety Office – Arch Hawkins

Membership – Tony Dockus

Newsletter Text – Fred Muffet

Social – Bill Lauro

FAA liaison – Bob Zanella

During the early part of 1982 the club started to have more social time at the meetings. A few minutes were set aside each month for refreshments and to get acquainted. The membership meetings were held at Fred Muffet's Balloon Saloon. The safety committee initiated plaques with pilots who hold NOBPA records for distance, duration or altitude. Their names would be put on a plaque. In March Arch Hawkins, Pete Hawkins and Ray Bryan set records for a distance of 113 miles in 3 hours and 45 minutes and altitude of 13,600 feet.

Barb Zodrow and Bill Maxwell were beginning to work on a landowner raffle program and how that program could help us. In the beginning, NOBPA was thinking of giving a balloon ride to the winner or an 'electrical appliance'. By the time the drawing came in November, we had decided bonds were the best choice and six were awarded in the first year of the program.

During this year NOBPA starts to experience problems with board member's attendance at board meetings and membership meetings. It appears NOBPA struggled with this for many years. The fact that board terms were for three years could have been an issue. In October, the board proposes a constitutional change. If a board member misses three consecutive board meetings or attends less than 8 board meetings per year, there will be a board review concerning their continued capacity as a board member.

Gayle Myers spent considerable time on bringing the 1985 world balloon championships to Akron. Gayle was tireless in this effort which spanned at least a year. It was narrowed down to Akron and Battle Creek, but Battle Creek won in the end.

Toward the end of 1982, the board decided to have the membership meetings move around to different places each month. They had been meeting at Fred Muffet's Balloon Saloon most of this year. One meeting was held at Dick Rossen's home and a few were at the Tallmadge fire station. Over the years, the club has spent many hours discussing where to have meetings. It has not always been easy to find a space that is centrally located and free to the club.

Some articles printed in the newsletter that year included 'tether procedures', 'how to care for wicker' and the 'dangers of low level flying'. Programs for 1982 included a speaker from a welding supply discussing propane and fire extinguishers, building of Goodyear's new blimp "America" and Todd Fisher on weather.

The banquet was announced for January and Bill Lauro asked for embarrassing stories about balloonist for awards – the Willies are born! At the end of 1982, NOBPA had 44 pilot members and 11 associate members.

Membership update

New members this year included Kurt McLaughlin who was a student pilot and purchased a new balloon. Also Tim Bennett and Sue Korosa. New Pilots were Danny Rossen, Cliff Cowen, Bob Brubaker, Kurt McLaughlin, Dennis Hart, Pam Hawkins, Mark Gerber, Bob Goelz, Annie Pryne, Jim Smith, Leroy Burkholder, John Hill, and Maury Sullivan. New balloons were purchased by Tim Bennett, Dave & Kathy Witner.

Balloon Events

Events were held in Wadsworth, Ravenna, Aurorafest, Wildwood Lake, Akron Air Show, Marysville and Tallmadge.

January 1983

The year started with the annual banquet, chaired by Joan Reisig held at Young's Restaurant. Arch Hawkins and Bill Lauro roasted some of the new pilots and they made trophies that poked fun at our mistakes. The Willies had become a regular award at the annual banquet. John Wells was awarded a trophy from the balloon club, for most sanctioned points at their races. The club awarded 5, \$100 savings bonds to landowners through the program administered by Barb Zodrow and Bill Maxwell. The new officers were elected in February, they were:

President – John Wells

Vice President – Marty Hess

Secretary – Ken Myers

Treasurer – Bev Sulzbach

FAA Rep. - Bob Zanella

Safety Officer – Fred Muffet

Membership – Dick Rossen

Events – Tony Dokus

As president, John Wells had some new ideas for our club. One was to host the Akron Cup Hot Air Balloon Race. This would help us gain experience in running an event, which was one reason we lost the bid to host the worlds. John also suggested the club put on a BFA Safety Seminar. Gayle Myers introduced the Pilot Achievement Award Program developed by the BFA. This was initiated to encourage pilots to continue improving their skill, knowledge and safety. Gayle also introduced the idea of having a seminar for crew which would include lecture and hands on experience with balloon equipment. This idea was developed and ended up being a great success. It was a BFA sanctioned crew seminar held on two Sunday afternoons at Sun Beau Valley and drew 114 participants. The BFA even used our ideas to format their own plan for the Education Committee.

Fred and Sandy Muffet took over the huge responsibility of publishing the newsletter. One of the new columns they started was a safety question of the month, with answers the following month. The freedom of the press was experienced when the March newsletter was printed with '**free beer**' written across the top. The editor felt this was a good incentive to increase attendance at monthly meetings. The balloon saloon provided free refreshments that month as the club watched the movie "Night Crossing".

At the November meeting, the membership approved changing the elections to December of each year. Tony Dockus was elected to the Board and President and the other new board members were Tim Bennett and Bill Maxwell.

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES WITH HISTORICAL CONTENT

HIGHLIGHTS IN HISTORY

By Beth Davidson

Printed in Summer 2009

The 1984 Ravenna Balloon-A-Fair proved to be a once in a life time experience for Ken and Gayle Myers. The task for this flight was to fly into the field and grab a set of car keys off the top of a poll that was about 25 feet high. Any pilot able to get the keys would go home with a new four door Chevy Citation. A “key grab” was popular at balloon events during the 1980’s but success was much more limited.

Ken and Gayle released a helium balloon and used a military compass to track its course. Using this information along with the wind reports from the pilot briefing they plotted their course and chose to launch from a yard near Twin Lakes. They launched with in the first third of the balloons. Gayle was piloting while Ken assisted with navigation. The winds carried them south along the railroad tracks which bordered the field they were aiming to hit. Throughout the flight they both knew the flight path was right on course and if they could keep this direction they will certainly be in the confines of the field. The Dolphin was flying low to stay on course. As they made a small ascent to clear the trees on the north west side of the field they could see the pole. They were on the right track but the last 50 yards were the most important. Ken and Gayle watched the balloon ahead of them as Todd Fisher was also on line with the pole. Todd made a valiant effort to grab the keys but a last minute overburn created too much ascent and even Todd’s long arms couldn’t quite reach the pole. The Dolphin pilots experience a more favorable flight path and were headed directly for the prize. Constant adjustments were made to maintain the precise height needed. When the pole was within reach, Ken leaned over and grabbed the keys. Success! They won the car! The duo immediately landed at the field to the cheers of the excited crowd. No balloonist in Ohio had ever grabbed the keys.

Another interesting fact about this event.... Sandy Hixenbaugh was not involved in ballooning at this time. She was a spectator at the Ravenna event and watched Ken and Gayle grab the keys. The weekend event piqued Sandy’s interest and she went on to become an accomplished pilot and eventual President of NOBPA.

The Balloon Lift for Farmers

During the mid to late 1980's the American farmer was dealing with tough times. Many farms were being foreclosed or auctioned. It was hard to make a living as a farmer. Because the farmers' landing fields played such an important role to balloonists at that time, Lori Greenstein encouraged the BFA to raise money and help one American farmer keep his livelihood. Thus the BFA challenged balloonists to donate their ride revenues from just one flight to benefit this cause. After all donations were received, the BFA would choose one farmer to receive the donations. Farmers needed to apply with the BFA and careful consideration was given as to how the money would be used. NOBPA was up to the challenge – we band together as a club and set out to raise \$10,000!! We held four fundraising events during the summer of 1987. At each of these flyouts, the pilots flew paying passengers and donated the proceeds to benefit the *Balloon Lift for Farmers*. Publicity for the events ranged from newspaper articles and posters to local radio stations broadcasting on sight.

On May 17, Bill and Molly Lavigna organized 17 rides from Alpine Valley Ski area and raised \$2055. On May 31, Don and Vicky Hamilton organized 8 balloons that flew from Orville. A total of 19 passengers flew and \$2300 was collected. (Remember, rides were selling for \$100 each at that time) Cliff Cowen organized flights from New Castle on June 14. I wasn't able to find a total amount for this flight but it must have been at least \$2000. The fourth flyout, scheduled for Martin Field in Canton was weathered out. Close to 20 more rides had been pledged for that day.

In a letter to NOBPA, Lori Greenstein of the BFA said, "Your gift of nearly \$7000 is by far, the largest donation to the project. ...I am in awe that you all could band together and get it all put together in just a couple of weeks! ...You have, for sure, put the Northeast Ohio Balloon Pilots Association on the map, so to speak! More over Albuquerque!"

On November 7, 1987, a check for \$40,000 was presented to Cheri and Dale Lavasseur of Marengo, Wisconsin. The Winter 1988 issue of *Ballooning* has an article about the family which received the money.

NOBPA's fund raising efforts for the *Balloon Life for Farmers* was a great accomplishment. These four events involved close to 40 pilots plus crew and organizers. It's a great reminder of the strength and dedication within our club.

and that's the way it was in NOBPA in 1987....

Lots more history has been written since this time and lots more has been accomplished. The story of NOBPA continues on its course as it fixes its sight towards the future. You just may have to join us if you want to find out what happens next!...