



Direction of EAA

Then and now

Tom Poberezny, President

Recently I received a letter from an EAA member (his EAA number is below 4,000) who has attended 51 conventions! He shared his thoughts regarding his EAA membership and said something that generated the reason for this column. He knew of EAA members who were displeased with EAA's direction. He stated, "Tom, they do not understand what EAA means to me and many thousands of others. They never will, as they are non-participants in events or never enjoyed the family atmosphere we have enjoyed camping all those years starting in Rockford."

I want to share my thoughts about EAA's direction and the results we have achieved to date. I have chosen five areas of importance, among many, that highlight our initial vision and current accomplishments:

Building your own airplane—EAA was founded on the principle that people should have the privilege to build their own airplane. Over the past five decades, the homebuilt aircraft movement has far exceeded expectations. Today more than 30,000 homebuilts are certificated, making up more than 20 percent of the active, single-engine piston fleet. For every airplane completed, 10 more may be under construction, keeping the dream of flight alive for thousands.

The homebuilt movement has spawned commercial aircraft companies. The innovative ideas of homebuilders have been recognized and integrated into all types of certificated airplanes. The homebuilt movement also plays a significant economic role within the aviation industry.

Some members have said we have lost our homebuilding focus. In reality, we have expanded our focus and engaged more people than ever before.

EAA AirVenture Oshkosh—Your annual convention started in Milwaukee in 1953. A few dozen aircraft from short distances away attended. Today, EAA AirVenture Oshkosh is the world's premier aviation event. Some say it's grown too big or too commercial, but whom do you tell not to come? The impact of "Oshkosh" is felt worldwide. The event's results and stature speak for themselves.

The EAA Aviation Center—EAA's first permanent headquarters was a small building in a Milwaukee suburb. In the early 1980s, I led the team that developed the EAA Aviation Center, which includes the EAA AirVenture Museum, EAA headquarters, Leadership Center, Pioneer Airport, and the Air Academy Lodge. Our vision was to make Oshkosh

the home for sport and general aviation year-round, not for just one week each summer. That dream has been realized.

Activities take place daily in Oshkosh, from aviation outreach activities for youth to visits by aviation industry leaders, but Oshkosh is also where the world comes for knowledge and information. Now, because of our websites and online archives, members can access EAA's vast resources 24/7, 365 days a year from their homes and workshops around the world.

Young Eagles—In the early 1990s this program was established with the goal of engaging more than one million youth by 2003, the 100th anniversary of powered flight. Today, almost 1.4 million young people have experienced flight, and thousands more have participated in EAA pro-

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grams such as the Air Academy, AeroScholars, KidVenture, and EAA AirVenture Museum educational initiatives. This has contributed significantly to building aviation's future through the next generation of pilots, builders, and leaders.

Sport Pilot/Light-Sport Aircraft—The vision of this initiative, which began more than a dozen years ago, was to lower the economic and time barriers to becoming a pilot and to encourage the development of more affordable aircraft. The sport pilot/light-sport aircraft regulation accomplishes that by reducing the investment of time and money needed to learn to fly and creating a new category of aircraft. It may take another five to 10 years for the aviation community to see a significant benefit, but already more young people are becoming pilots, older pilots are able to continue flying more economically, and companies like Cessna and Cirrus are embracing the new aircraft category.

As I look back on the direction we have taken, I'm reminded of the campaign to build the EAA Aviation Center. The theme was "Putting Wings on Dreams." EAA has done that for tens of thousands of people!

Lastly, included within the magazine this month is EAA's Annual Report (see pages 121 to 136). I invite you to review the progress your association made in 2007. 