



## Big Tent, Diversity

### Our strengths

*Tom Poberezny, President*

This fall's EAA board of directors meeting brought together the leaders from EAA and its divisions, councils, and affiliates. Eighty-six people, representing the spectrum of EAA's aviation interest communities, spent two days in Oshkosh working on your behalf, centering their discussions on the breadth of activities EAA does and should represent...and how we can do it better!

EAA's strength has always been its inclusiveness, open to anyone who wishes to participate. While EAA is most closely associated with aircraft homebuilders, vintage aircraft restorers attended the first EAA meeting in 1953. Warbird aircraft owners began displaying their aircraft at Rockford around 1960, aerobatic enthusiasts began joining us prior to 1970, and ultralighters emerged in the 1970s.

While EAA's diversity may seem to be scattered along many paths, we are alike in that we all have a passion for flight. But our growing diversity is also a challenge. That was brought to mind as I read a column in a recent chapter newsletter:

*"Sometimes I wish our dear founder, Paul Poberezny, only sent his son Tom to AI & A&P school! Most of us know Tom Poberezny is a graduate of Northwestern University. Reading this month's Sport Aviation, I noticed the approved election of our class one Board of Directors are all big money and big influence guys!...What I'm really saying is it sure would be nice to see a couple of real homebuilders on the board."*

It's a point worth discussing. EAA's board of directors does have builders and restorers in its midst...50 percent of the current EAA directors have engaged in building or restoring an airplane. The equivalent figure for the EAA membership at large is 35 percent. The board is more than representative of our founding mission; it also represents the other 65 percent of our membership.

Personally, I have worked on many aircraft projects. When I enlisted in the Wisconsin Air National Guard in the late 1960s, it was not as a pilot but as an aircraft mechanic. I spent six educational years busting my knuckles on the round engines on the KC-97. Combined with earning my engineering degree, it provided a beneficial combination of concept and practical "do-it" knowledge.

Yes, craftsmanship is an essential part of EAA, but we have become aviation's "big tent." We invite and engage a wide variety of interests, representing men and women who want to fly, regardless of aircraft type. The homebuilders and others who started EAA 55 years ago brought with them the principles of innovation, high standards, and participation that are still proud hallmarks today. Although we are not exclusively a homebuilders' organization, we strive to provide the best support and information for builders. Our challenge is to embrace our diversity and make it a strength, while continuing the proud legacy of those

who built EAA. EAA members who have never been builders or restorers greatly respect and marvel at what craftsmen can do.

At "Oshkosh" each summer, we engage all aspects of the aviation community, bringing new people into EAA. Thousands of dreams have been ignited because of the "spark" called EAA AirVenture. That "Oshkosh energy" is the genesis for EAA's future direction...Oshkosh365: The excitement, variety, and involvement created at your annual convention will be available throughout the year. For example, the experiences of Oshkosh will be shared through the Internet, engaging a robust social community online.

The pilot population is declining, decreasing from more than 800,000 to currently 600,000. The pilot community can't continue to atrophy...it must grow! This will only happen by reaching out to people of all ages, especially young people. EAA must offer new and engaging activities to supplement our core programs. EAA AirVenture Oshkosh will serve as the template for our future. We are not abandoning our founding mission, but rather expanding the opportunity for participation. Building a healthier aviation community is our goal...and our responsibility.

Over the next couple of months I will provide additional insights on how we serve the craftsman community as well as the rest of our membership. You will also learn more about Oshkosh365. 