



President's Corner - October 2008

Here we are at the peak of another color season! I hope you are able to get out and enjoy the beautiful weather that we have been having for the past few days.

I would like to begin this month by thanking all of you who participated in our recent Chapter Air Academy with a special thanks to Greg Durand for coordinating the event and to Dave VanDenburg for coordinating the use of the NMU facilities and also for his professional presentation on aerodynamics. Fred Joyal officiated over the navigation segment which was also very interesting. I received several statements of appreciation from the parents of the participants who marveled at the dedication and professionalism of our chapter staff. TV6 news was also at Sawyer on Saturday (unfortunately after we concluded the academy flights) and reported on the late news which, alas, I was not able to see but did hear that it was on. I'm not sure how many of you caught this, but about a week later while watching the evening news, the station manager, Rob Jamros presented a commentary which is called "The UPSide". This segment is run occasionally and features notable events in the area. To my surprise he talked about our EAA chapter and our Air Academy stating that "The local EAA Air Academy is a wonderful way to get kids interested in aviation". It is good to know that we are making a difference!

This Saturday's chapter meeting will feature a guest speaker who will talk about his adventures in Oshkosh last summer at the EAA Air Academy. Cliff Young was the young man that our chapter sponsored by paying his registration down payment of \$150.00. Cliff has attended the academy twice within the last three years and is entertaining the possibility of a career in aviation. I am hoping to have a good attendance this month so please come out and listen to Cliff!

As fall is progressing and winter is just around the corner we need to start planning for our annual Christmas party. If you have any new ideas please share them at the meeting and we can put a plan into action.

We also have several of our chapter pilots who are just short of their "10 for 2008" target of Young Eagles flown. As you may recall, each of our pilots gets one credit for each of the kids they fly which translates into \$1.00 off of the cost of sending a young person to the EAA Air Academy. This is only true if the pilot flies at least 10 kids per year so if you know of a young person between the ages of 8 and 17 who would like a ride please let me know so I can arrange for them to fly with us before the end of the year.

See you on Saturday ... 10:00am in the GA terminal.

Ted Kirkpatrick

PLEASE DO NOT YELL AT THE GUESTS

Yeah right. Anyway , when you go to tram driver orientation, that is the first thing you are told, it is the “Prime Directive”.

But, I am getting ahead of myself. For the past two Airventures at Oshkosh, while the rest of the chapter was feeding the wild “water buffalo herd”, and doing other chores, I took a different tack. I tried a different type of volunteering activity as a tram operator / conductor.

I had heard it is a challenging job, not much in the way of physical activity, and you get to interact with the “guests”. Share stories and provide a service by transporting people to different destinations. Once again...yeah right.

You start out with an orientation about two weeks prior to the convention, where you meet Jim and Bill who run the operation. After introductions and a few jokes, you are briefed on your job. If you are new to the operation, you become a conductor , paired to an driver who has been doing it for a while. A hand out is passed around which has at the bottom amongst other statements... PLEASE DO NOT YELL AT THE GUESTS. Now, you start wondering, isn't this supposed to be one happy family at the Mecca of aviation ? What does it mean? Then you start to hear a few tales, and think to yourself NAH, can't be true. After this, you are loaded onto a tram and driven around the grounds to see the routes and stops.

Arriving there on a Thursday before the convention starts, I set up camp. As I have to work for a living, and probably will never retire, I can't arrive any earlier, so my sight is usually a good ½ to ¾ of a mile away. Checking in with the tram office on Friday morning, I get my assignment and after everyone is assembled, we are taken to the central staging area and paired up. As a driver, you don't get to see too much of what is happening in the back, cept when the conductor tells you to stop or go. That diesel engine is loud and you usually wind up with ear plugs in. You do get a long lasting farmers tan though as you are not shaded to well. Being a driver also has its moments, so I will start with the guy in back.

Now, the conductor or tail gunner job is another story. As the tram starts to move, you make your speech ...with embellishments after a while, about sitting down, open beverages may cause you to meet the person sitting next to you, no jumping on or off the tram while in motion, and what the various stops are. This is where the “prime directive” comes into play. It is sort of like the flight attendant on an airliner giving the safety briefing, and I know that we all listen to that speech. While moving along at the fast speed of 7 miles per hour, something will happen overhead, and a person will decide to stand up and take a picture. So, you “firmly suggest” that they must remain seated. You are answered with a one-fingered salute. Once again in motion, a bunch of kids decide to jump on and stand, as there are not enough seats, you kindly request that they depart. After calling you a few names and saying things that would make George Carlin blush, they jump off and you get saluted again. After a couple hours of this, you get relieved , where you recount the events of your first ride over an endless supply of “mystery meat” sandwiches and all the watered down Gatorade , water or cold coffee you can drink. As this goes on for a six hour shift, at the end of the day, you are now an old hat in the transportation game and maybe the next day you will get to drive and not have to put up with the amount of “love” that is flowing in the trams. Being a tail gunner is not all bad. I have met some very interesting people, shared stories of my flying career (“what, you flew a Cessna 172 from Guam to Saipan over 120 miles of Pacific Ocean? You must be crazy”), and helped a lot of handicapped people to better enjoy the convention.

A few days later, I was promoted to a driver. WOW, now I can relax.... Yeah, right. Besides working on your tan, you get to interact with the many suicide drivers in all sorts of vehicles while pulling two heavily loaded cars of “visitors”. While driving a loud hot noisy beast at the breakneck speed of between 5 and 7 MPH, you encounter many other critters who have no idea what they are doing while driving in a traffic pattern that each one creates for themselves. You have the “Prime Directive” in your head, so you can't run them over, so you learn about infinite patience and when “saluted for your efforts, you communicate your thanks with various hand signals, you have learned over the course of your day, with a smile. After all, you can't hear what they are saying, so you learn sign language.

I could go on with this story forever, as I have 2 years of tales to tell. I was honored to be involved with the “Make A Wish “ Foundation this year, escorting the kids and their families on a special tram to various events . I was touched with their stories as I talked to their families. I also got to drive for various VIP events after hours.

Sooooooo, that is what I did on my summer vacation for the past two years. If anyone wants to try it, I will be happy to let you know the ins and outs of the job, after all, I am now an old hand at it.

Submitted by Bill Landry