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The Future

Innovation, youth, and access to flight

EAA's fall board meetings have just concluded. The sessions included leaders from our three divisions—the International Aerobatic Club, Warbirds of America, and Vintage Aircraft Association—as well as our affiliate, the National Association of Flight Instructors. The EAA Homebuilt Aircraft Council and EAA Ultralight Council also attended.

During the weekend's meetings we inducted outstanding individuals into the EAA Sport Aviation Halls of Fame. They are people who have established EAA's legacy of craftsmanship and innovation.

As we recognized the past by honoring them, we also must look ahead. As EAA members you can be proud of the contributions you are making to build aviation's future. There are many things that we do collectively, but there are three that I would like to focus on...

Innovation, youth, and access to flight.

EAA was founded in 1953 on the core principles of individuals using their innovative skills and craftsmanship to build airplanes. Innovation has been a mainstay of the organization throughout its history. EAA AirVenture highlights the theme of innovation each year as airplanes, technologies, and products are introduced at Oshkosh.

In the early 1990s we surveyed 10,000 EAA members, and asked: "What is the most important thing that EAA should focus on in the future?" More than 5,000 members responded, saying that young people did not have the same opportunity to get involved in aviation as was

possible in the '40s, '50s, and '60s. We needed to engage youth to build and grow aviation's future.

We contacted the 5,000 EAAers who responded and asked how they got involved in aviation. Their number one incentive was an airplane ride from a parent, relative, mentor, or pilot at the local airport. That process gave birth to the Young Eagles program.

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Young Eagles has grown into the most significant youth initiative in aviation history. We have reached more than 1,250,000 kids, who have become further engaged through AeroScholars, the EAA Air Academy, and local opportunities through EAA chapters and members. We will continue to develop a youth continuum that will show young adults a clear path to lifetime involvement in aviation.

While EAA was promoting the spirit of innovation and developing youth programs, we also addressed the economics of learning to fly and aircraft ownership. This started more than a decade ago under the banner of sport pilot/light-sport aircraft. Learning to fly can be a daunting task. The completion rate for new-student starts is barely above 30 percent. The cost of learning how to fly can range as high as \$10,000. The issues of time

and money can be significant barriers to the world of flight.

With that in mind EAA invested significant resources in support of the development of the sport pilot/light-sport aircraft rules. This vision was shared by leaders within the FAA. The path to the final rule was long and arduous. But the goals were worth the effort.

But that was just the first step. Having the rules provided the opportunity, but we did not have the infrastructure. Looking back to September 2004, when the rule was introduced, I was proud of the milestone we reached, but I realized we were embarking upon a marathon.

The steps we had to follow were to educate, engage, create credibility, and support aircraft product development and training opportunities. How are we doing? We are just where I expected to be. Numerous pilots are currently exercising sport pilot privileges. Hundreds have earned sport pilot certificates. More important, the Light Aircraft Manufacturers Association reports more than 500 airplanes either purchased or ordered. This is a solid start.

At AirVenture 2006, Cessna introduced its light-sport aircraft. This was the first major manufacturer that expressed interest in developing a new airplane according to the ASTM standards. Cessna brings the potential of a training infrastructure that will accelerate the process and the impact of sport pilot and light-sport aircraft. The opportunity to grow aviation's base is upon us.

Innovation, youth, and economical ways to fly are three important goals for EAA that we are fulfilling on your behalf. 