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EAA's Landmark Contributions

Homebuilding, AirVenture, Young Eagles & Sport Pilot

As the new year begins, there is a tendency to think back over the past 12 months and review. Any individual or organization would like to make a significant contribution over time, something that can be pointed to that says, "We made a difference...we made things better." This year I found myself thinking back over the past five decades and realizing that there are four places where EAA has made more than a significant contribution. I would call them landmarks in the geography of today's aviation community.

I wish I could say that each one was planned. They were not. Some evolved over time, but because of hard work, innovation, and creativity all of them made a significant impact, and still do.

EAAers should be proud to have helped aviation at large in establishing these four landmarks, any one of which could be remembered as a legacy all on its own:

- **The Homebuilding Movement.** Back in 1953, the founders of EAA focused the organization on people building their own airplanes. Never in their wildest dreams did they imagine that their dream would evolve into a movement that would give birth to production aircraft companies such as Columbia and Cirrus, or the kit-building industry that includes Van's and Sonex. They had no way to know their dreams would help provide the energy and incentive—and the marketplace—for many of the innovative contributions that we see in aviation today, from ballistic parachutes to handheld GPS to glass panels.

- **EAA AirVenture Oshkosh.** What began as the members' annual convention, EAA AirVenture Oshkosh has grown into one of aviation's premier events. It has gained worldwide stature based on its own unique personality, culture, variety, and the depth and breadth of its programs. It is grassroots aviation at its best, mixed with the excitement of innovation, new designs, and technology. It gathers together the entire spectrum of aviation, with all of its participants feeling comfortable taking part. AirVenture has given all of aviation a place to call home once each year, a place to return to for revitalization, a welcoming habitat for dreamers and doers, and a way for the world to see the grace with which we gather and the innovation we foster.

The credit goes to members such as yourself, whose involvement, leadership, and passion made – and continues to make – all this possible.

- **Young Eagles.** Young Eagles is without question the most significant aviation youth initiative in the history of aviation. The numbers—1.3 million Young Eagles flown—speak for themselves. But more importantly, it is building aviation's future by investing in young people who will become tomorrow's leaders, engineers, designers, pilots, aircraft builders, and par-

ticipants. It is more than flying young people; it is an investment in aviation's future that will pay dividends for decades and centuries to come.

- **Sport Pilot/Light-Sport Aircraft.** This EAA initiative is different than the rest. Homebuilding, AirVenture, and Young Eagles each evolved. Sport Pilot, instead, began as a mission backed by a 10-year investment promoting regulatory change, and now three years of work implementing the infrastructure necessary to make it work. The effort, as it unfolds, is building a new base for aviation by making pilot training more affordable and therefore more accessible to new participants. I intend to communicate more about the sport pilot initiative in future Position Reports.

As a member, you look for the tangible benefits that you expect, such as *EAA Sport Aviation* and/or *EAA Sport Pilot* magazine, participation at AirVenture Oshkosh, and chapter programs. But just as important are the intangibles, the emotion, the passion, and the vision that helps an organization like EAA build on the past to help create aviation's future. Imagine what the world would be without EAA. You would see a less vibrant and energized aviation community.

Any one of the four landmarks I mentioned would be a significant contribution, but the fact that we have four such legacies makes EAA truly a unique organization. The credit goes to members such as yourself, whose involvement, leadership, and passion made—and continues to make—all this possible. Be proud, you deserve it. 