



# AirVenture Thoughts

## Something for everyone in aviation

*Tom Poberezny, President*

As this issue goes to press, EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2007 has just concluded. As I think back over my 30 years as chairman of “Oshkosh,” it is clear the depth, diversity, and growth of our convention has exceeded all expectations. There is truly something for everyone in the aviation community at AirVenture.

Oshkosh is the home of innovation, new design, technology, and craftsmanship. This was never more evident than on opening day when a multitude of announcements took place. It began with the surprise arrival of the Eclipse single-engine concept jet. Then Cessna unveiled its new light-sport aircraft...the SkyCatcher. Shortly thereafter, Cirrus announced its entry into the light-sport aircraft marketplace with its new Cirrus SRS. This list continued...Epic Aircraft, RotorWay, Sonex, and others. The announcements indicate these are some of the best times in general aviation history. Technology and innovation are making a major impact.

EAA's own new technology was also evident, as more than 1.25 million people from all over the world participated in Oshkosh without leaving their homes, by way of *AirVenture.org*. Those virtual attendees viewed EAA's Brightcove multimedia offerings almost a quarter million times, and they visited almost four million separate EAA web pages. These metrics indicate without doubt the value of EAA's new media knowledge and information content, an area we are continuously improving. Keep visiting on the web as we will continue to publish multimedia stories about the spirit that infuses EAA—from the aircraft our members build or fly to technical forums,

chapter activities, and treasures from our world-class archives.

Thirteen years ago, EAA had a vision to grow the ranks of those who enter the world of aviation. That vision culminated in the sport pilot/light-sport aircraft regulations. During the past three years we have spent significant resources developing and promoting a whole new aviation infrastructure built around these regulations.

EAA's vision was validated when Cessna and Cirrus announced their new light-sport aircraft. It reinforced our vision for entry-level participation by a whole new group of people, while at the same time negating the perception that sport pilot was a certificate only for those who had lost or feared losing their medical.

At its height, aviation had more than 800,000 active pilots. The latest figures indicate there are just shy of 600,000 U.S. pilots. A major reason for the drop is that pilots trained during World War II or on the GI Bill have been leaving aviation because of age and related reasons.

We need to replace them. We need to compete with other recreational activities for discretionary time and dollars. That is where sport pilot and light-sport aircraft come in. Aviation is not going to remain dynamic and strong with 600,000 pilots. We need a million pilots.

Our vision for the future incorporates EAA chapters, the National Association of Flight Instructors, and other EAA resources to encourage people to learn how to fly.

At AirVenture, we introduced the Learn to Fly Center, which received thousands of visitors. If EAA can encourage thousands of people to build

airplanes—10.5 percent of the GA fleet is experimental aircraft—then we can also encourage hundreds of thousands of people to learn to fly. A critical part of learning how to fly is a sense of community. EAAers, better than anyone, can provide newcomers mentoring and paths to participation.

EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2007 was a milestone. Our vision for sport pilot/light-sport aircraft was validated. Our mission of outreach to young people who might swell the pilot population was reinforced with the introduction of a new student membership.

AirVenture was also about advocacy. Government representatives heard your concerns on user fees throughout the week. In addition, seven members of the House Aviation Subcommittee, including chairman Jerry Costello, D-Illinois, and Wisconsin Rep. Tom Petri, the ranking Republican on the panel, visited with EAAers to discuss user fees and modernization of the air traffic system for an entire day. Meanwhile, Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Oklahoma, attended AirVenture for the 29th year, camped here with his family, and talked to EAAers at Member Village about user fees.

These are examples of EAA's important proactive advocacy. We address issues by bringing legislators and officials into the field with EAA members and the aviation community. This was reinforced at the Meet the Administrator session when FAA Administrator Marion Blakey introduced members of her senior team, many who were in Oshkosh over several days.

EAA AirVenture may last only one week, but its significant impact is felt year-round. 