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# Aviation People...

## ... are a special lot

It's Labor Day weekend as I'm writing this month's column, and I'm sitting at a campsite in the Sylvania Wilderness in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, watching a red squirrel maneuvering so he can steal peanuts off our picnic table. EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2007 is starting to feel like it was a long time ago, even though I brought my laptop along to the woods to work on the "AirVenture 2007 Revisited" story (see page 24). Our deadline for the October issues of *EAA Sport Aviation* and *EAA Sport Pilot* is September 6, and we're pushing hard to wrap our Oshkosh coverage... 'cause, well, not meeting the deadline isn't an option.

As I look through my notes about AirVenture 2007, thinking of all that needs to be included in our wrap-up of the event, my mind wanders to think about the people I met during the week, the people who embrace aviation as a vocation or avocation. I suppose there might be other interest groups with as cool of people as aviation has...sailing comes to mind... but I'm not sure. Aviation people are a special lot.

When I started at EAA, lo those many years ago, the first thing that impressed me was how many older people were still actively involved. I distinctly remember Roy Redman bringing Ole Fahlin to EAA headquarters to visit with Gene Chase, then editor of *The Vintage Airplane*. Ole was... well...old. I think he was approaching 100. But the famous prop maker was

as sharp as a tack and more agile than lots of folks two-thirds his age.

Then there's Steve Wittman, EAA's neighbor across the airport named for him, who'd stop in often to visit with Jack Cox. He graced us with his wit and spirit until he left us unceremoniously at the age of 94. I'll never forget his surprise 90th birthday party when he winked at me and told me to "Be careful." I was afraid to ask what he meant!


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But, I'm not just talking about older people; I'm talking about the vast majority of aviation people who are positive-thinking folks, joyful about life. My point is, there's something about being infected with the aviation bug that keeps people more "alive," more involved with life. That spirit doesn't just infect pilots, so the cause isn't necessarily related to having to pass

a medical on a regular basis. I think maybe it's related to having a sense of adventure. A sense that life is worth living well; that it's worth taking well-managed risks.

In other areas of my life I encounter people who find life dull and a drudgery, but I rarely run into those kinds of folks in my aviation circles. Sure, there are a few sourpusses in the lot, but even they seem to be involved and engaged in life. It'd be an interesting psychological study to examine how one's choice of hobbies affects one's life. But of this I'm convinced; life's better when you're involved with something you believe in, care about, and enjoy. I think that's the crux of why aviation people are special; that's why the aviation enthusiasts I meet who are retired say, "I don't know how I had time to work."

As for the red squirrel, we lentened and tossed him a few peanuts that he quickly hid in various places throughout the woods. I just hope he was recording the GPS coordinates in his little brain, otherwise I doubt he'll find 'em in this winter's snow.

About the photo...you never know whom you're going to meet when hanging around aviation circles. Take, for example, the time I met Duke, the Bush's beans dog (at least that's who the handler claimed he was), at the Mohawk Valley Ultralight Fly-In in upstate New York. Sorry, he didn't tell me the secret recipe, either. 

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