



## Building a Future

*Tom Poberezny, President*

When EAA was founded in 1953, the mission and focus of the organization was to create the opportunity for people to build their own airplanes. Education, craftsmanship, and, to a certain extent, design innovation were the guiding principles. During that early time in our history, the dream for people to get into the air revolved around the ability to take parts from other airplanes and assemble them into the airplane of their dreams. Time and money were also factors.

Little did anyone dream then that the amateur-built program that exists today would have the impact on aviation that it does. More than 29,000 amateur-built aircraft are certificated on the United States aircraft registry. That is approximately 20 percent of the active single-engine general aviation fleet. More importantly, the innovations that have taken place in the homebuilt movement are many.

To build your own aircraft is a major undertaking. Many of the thousands who have completed their own aircraft never dreamed they would have the ability, time, and skills to do so. But the mentoring and educational programs EAA provides fostered their success.

I shared with EAA members and aviation enthusiasts during EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2007 that aviation is experiencing a precipitous decline in the number of pilots, with the number of certificated pilots dropping from 800,000-plus in the 1980s to less than 600,000 today. There are many reasons for this, but at the top of the list is the fact that tens of thousands of pilots were trained during World

War II and after the war as a result of the GI Bill. Many of those pilots have left aviation because of their age or loss of medical, and others have passed on. We have never developed an infrastructure to replace those pilots and build an aviation community of the size necessary to support a viable aviation industry.

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Now, the formula used to encourage people to build their own aircraft is the same one we want to use to engage people to participate in aviation, specifically, to learn how to fly. The template of mentorship and sharing of information built around local chapters and community will also work to introduce more people to flying.

The core of our efforts will be EAA chapters...almost 1,000 strong. They have been the essence of community and education for those who have built and restored aircraft. In addition, EAA's chapters have helped to build aviation's future through the Young Eagles program, reaching more than 1.3 million youths. That same template will provide us the format for success in encouraging more people to

join the aviation community, either as enthusiasts or fliers.

Recently we held a successful chapter leaders workshop in Oshkosh with more than 25 chapters participating. The mutual goal of chapters and EAA is to grow our memberships, both at the local and the national level. In doing so, we want to show people the path of participation, which ultimately may lead them to learn how to fly.

Through EAA's work on the sport pilot/light-sport aircraft regulations, we've put the pieces in place to reduce the barriers of time and money that keep so many people from learning to fly. As I've said before, the first step is the most difficult. With the sport pilot certificate, becoming a pilot is much more accessible, as is owning an aircraft. The lower price of new, ready-to-fly light-sport aircraft, as compared to other new aircraft in the GA fleet, reduces the cost of flight training and provides a market of more affordable ready-to-fly aircraft.

Though the pieces are there, the key is building a sense of community, participation, relationships, and information. EAA will be at the forefront of aviation's future in encouraging and implementing a program that will facilitate more people learning how to fly.

There are many purposes for associations and organizations, including advocacy and education. Both are important to EAA. Our mission is also to encourage future participation and build a solid aviation infrastructure and community that will ensure that aviation remains a vital industry and community going forward. 