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J.W. and Joe

Personifying the spirit of EAA

I've been living vicariously this past month...following my new friend, 71-year-old J.W. French, on his travels around the United States in his Acro Sport. The Acro Sport is too heavy and too fast to be sport-pilot eligible, but I'm going to ignore the fact that might make this story "inappropriate" for *EAA Sport Pilot* magazine. It's not inappropriate; this is about EAAers in action—about the heart and spirit of EAAers.

The story of how I met J.W. starts with a note that J.W. sent to EAA Founder Paul Poberezny. J.W. advised Paul that he was going to continue his Sam Burgess Memorial Junket this summer—re-creating a flight Burgess had made in 1974 in an Acro Sport. J.W. had started on his re-creation flight in 2005 but ran out of horsepower, literally, in Wyoming when he couldn't make it through Mullen Pass. Since then, J.W. traded his Bakeng Deuce for a 160-hp Acro Sport and was ready to go again.

Paul told Steve Buss, manager of EAA's chapter programs, about J.W.'s adventure and suggested EAA chapters might like to support him en route. Sam had made a point of visiting as many chapters as possible in 1974.

J.W. and Steve met at the Sun 'n Fun Fly-In in Lakeland, Florida, and talked about getting the word out. That's where EAA's magazines come in...because I walked into the room right after J.W. left, and Steve told me the story. I immediately tracked J.W. down on the flightline, talked with him a bit, took a few photos, and we

ran a short article about J.W.'s proposed flight in the June issue of *EAA Sport Aviation* and published his e-mail address—in case chapters wanted to contact him. In true EAA style, they did in spades!

So many chapters contacted J.W. that he moved his start date (originally July 1) up by two weeks to accommodate the extra stops. J.W. departed Fort Myers, Florida, on June 15, and he's been having the time of his life ever since. (You can read postings about his flight online at www.AirVenture.org/2008/news/080702_french.html.)

J.W. has crossed deserts and mountains, eaten lots of good food, and visited with friends new and old, and he has been having a great time. When I spoke with him yesterday (July 8), he said, "If I'm not having fun, then I'm not doing something right." I couldn't agree more, and I wish I could be flying along with J.W., and I don't think I'm alone. J.W.'s doing what many of us dream of doing...though like him we might have to wait until retirement to make that dream come true. But the reality of his flight is even better than his long-held dream...because of the generosity and kindness of EAAers. That's what makes this association so special! (By the way, you can visit with J.W. at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2008. His Acro Sport will be parked in front of Homebuilders Headquarters, right next to a Bucker Jungmeister that Sam Burgess flew in all 50 states in 1970. EAA AirVenture Museum Curator Ron

Twellman moved Sam's Bucker from storage for the "occasion.")

I mentioned another name in the title of this column—Joe. That's Joe Norris, specifically. Just this past week, it's been announced that Joe will move from his current position of senior aviation specialist in the aviation services staff to become EAA's homebuilders community manager, a newly created position. Joe's been an EAA member since 1976 and an employee

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since 2001, and he's someone I turn to frequently when we need technical advice or someone to review articles before we print them in the magazine, which causes me to owe him an occasional beer now and then when the gang gathers after hours at West End Pizza. (He keeps tabs and lets me know when I'm in arrears.) He's built a Sonerai II and currently flies a Waco UPF-7, a Cessna 180, and a Super Cub. He is an EAA technical counselor and flight advisor, as well as an airframe and powerplant mechanic with inspection authorization and a certificated flight instructor single-engine-land and helicopter.

Like J.W., Joe epitomizes the spirit of EAA, and he'll be a great advocate for homebuilders. It's people like J.W. and Joe who make me proud to be an EAA member. 