



# **RADIO CONTROL CLUB OF DETROIT**

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***A HISTORY OF THE RADIO CONTROL CLUB OF DETROIT***

***1953-----2010***

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The Radio Control Club of Detroit is one of the oldest chartered clubs in the AMA and the club has been in the forefront of RC activity for many years. I joined the club in 1972 and after talking to some of the long time members thought that some of the history of the club should be made known to the present membership.

Willie McMath has given me quite a bit of information concerning the early days, he was a charter member and is one of the few still with the club. Thanks to his help and others like Helen Brett, Tom McCoy, etc., some of the history can be put down on paper.

So, let's return to the thrilling days of yesteryear and see how it all started.

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# RADIO CONTROL CLUB OF DETROIT

## Chapter One

### The Beginning

The Radio Control Club of Detroit was chartered with the Academy of Model Aeronautics April 2, 1953. The club was actually started in 1952 and it's believed to be the first AMA chartered all radio control club.

Some of the early flying took place at a field at Northwestern and Nine Mile Road, presently the location of the Northland shopping center. The radio equipment in use at that time was heavy and cumbersome with only one frequency available. Taxi and takeoff was difficult since there was no steerable tail wheel. Even so, the fliers managed to get some very good flights and performed very respectful aerobatics using this type of equipment.

Early in the 1950's RCCD began to have a yearly model show. The site of the first show was held in Royal Oak where over 100 attended. The next location was in a hall rented in Rouge Park with 200-250 people in attendance. The show then moved to Sylvania, Ohio at the Trilby Log Cabin. This was a turning point in the show since the accessibility given it by the turnpike brought even greater attendance and interest. The Toledo Weak Signals ran an even larger event, located further South, this time in Maumee Ohio, at the Lucas County Recreation Hall, Closer to the Ohio Turnpike. A move was eventually made to its present location of Toledo to make it more accessible to all parts of the country. Under the guidance of the Weak Signals has become one of the biggest and best RC expositions in the country.

In the late 1950's the Nine Mile Rd. field was lost to the club when the property was sold to the J.L. Hudson Co. The club then moved to a field at Nine Mile Rd. and Hoover then later we flew off of a field at 15 mile rd. and Stephenson Hwy.

In 1960 the club moved to a field at Eighteen Mile and Mound Roads. The owner of the property was a Mrs. Helmick. The club field was on the old "Wings Airport" and it was there that all of the Detroit Invitational's were held. The club members did all of the work on the field and developed a first class airstrip. We stayed on this field until 1971. At that time a new water line for the city of Detroit was put in running right thru the field. We did continue to use this as a temporary field for several years.

The following is an excerpt from an article written by the clubs first president, Ernie Kratzet, and featured in the September 1962 issue of "Model Airplane News".

"Sponsors call it the PGA of Radio Control Contesting, it could well be, when a rundown is made of those invited. A virtual who's who of mult-channel, the best device to separate the men from the men, not the boys".

On the week following Labor Day, traditionally the “Cream of the Crop” of RC flyers in the United States and Canada gather in Detroit for what has become to be known as “The Experts Contest”. For the past three years it has been formally called “The Detroit Invitational” and prior to that “The Great Lakes Meet”.

The entry list is determined by invitation from the RCCD. By limiting the entry list to about 20 of the top flyers it was felt that a truly dream contest would result.”

This was the tenth anniversary of the event. The following list of previous winners indicates the wide geographical spread:

1953 - JIM PEPINO - LONDON, ONTARIO

1954 - L.D. CRISP - PERRYVILLE, INDIANA

1955 - HAROLD DEBOLT - BUFFALO NEW YORK

1956 - JIM GALL - TOLEDO, OHIO

1957 - ED KAZMARSKI - CALUMET CITY, ILLINOIS

1958 - ED KAZMARSKI - CALUMET CITY, ILLINOIS

1959 - ED KECK - ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

1960 - BOB DUNHAM - LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

1961 - ED KAZMARSKI - CALUMET CITY, ILLINOIS

An interesting fact was brought out in the article that concerned the judging. Not only was the flying of top notch caliber but the judging was first rate. This was due to club training and a system of judging that became to be known as “the Detroit system.” “The system” evolved from the first invitational, the first in the country, when the 25 invited participants flew using no set rules or patterns. Rules, patterns and judging were made up as the event progressed. Two judges were used and their scores were given by hand signals to the announcer who would immediately announce the total for all to hear.

The invitational didn’t just happen. It evolved from some thirty contests over a ten year period, including two national contests. The trophy for the contest was a perpetual trophy and was the property of RCCD. The last winner kept it in his possession until the next contest.

In 1960 the club constitution was rewritten by Tom Brett, John Dessenberger, and Ernie Kratzet. It was in that same year that Skip Mast joined the club. All the work done at the contests was done by a rather small group of people and that meant that everyone had to do their part. The contest schedule showed that they did have a full work schedule. The events included a rudder only contest on May 7, July 8-9 was a multi, intermediate,

scale and pylon, and Sept. 9-10 was the dates set for the Detroit invitational. All of these were at the Wings Airport.

The next year, 1961, brought new challenges and opportunities for the club. To prevent tax liability on the dues they had to be under \$10.00 per member. To overcome legal considerations it was decided that the club would incorporate. Helen Brett has been handling the corporation papers for the club until just recently.

To further improve the flying situation, an additional set of frequencies was allocated for RC aircraft use.

Brown 26.995	Red 27.045	Orange 27.095
Yellow 27.145	Green 27.195	Yellow/Black 6 Meters

It was also the same year that new frequency ribbons were introduced.

1963 brought further growth to the club in the form of field maintenance equipment, such as the Ford Jubilee tractor which was purchased for \$900.00 Ed Kowalski amended the motion for this purchase to include a flail mower, and both units were purchased for under \$1400.00.

During the years 1962-1964 the club was fortunate to have as its president, Tom Brett. Tom was an excellent flier, builder, and designer of pattern type aircraft. His design skills resulted in the Nimbus I, II, and III, Apogee, Perigee, Cirrus and the high tailed TBX-1.

It was Ed Izzo that first introduced the building of wings using expanded bead foam to the club.

With the announcement by Ken Taylor of the loss of the 18 mile road field a new site was found on 14 Mile Road between Van Dyke and Mound Roads. This property was owned by a Mr. DeDecker. The field was in an area that had houses closer to the field than had been the case at 18 Mile. It was in July that we had our first complaint. The police department requested that the club require mufflers be used on planes that were flying after 7:30 P.M. A decision was made to require mufflers on all planes except scale and pylon racers. Dave Keats made a motion that there would be no flying before 10:00 A.M., a rule that stands even today.

Pylon flying, under the direction of Dave Keats, became an event in which the RCCD began to become very involved. The club was meeting at this time at Westwood School, located at Martin and Hoover Roads. The only day open was Tuesday, therefore this became the official club meeting day.

## Chapter Two

### Schwartz Field 1972

The 14 Mile Rd field had been sold and the club was in the process of looking for a new flying site. Two places were being considered, one on Dequindre Rd. and one at 30 Mile Rd and I-94.

The one that seemed to have the most potential was the site at 30 Mile Rd. The field was for sale and the club was considering buying it. Approval for a flying field use was still required by the Casco Township council. It was thought that a flying demonstration would show the council just what we would be doing at the field. The council agreed and a flying demonstration was held at the site. The planes were flown off the road since it dead-ended at the expressway and had no traffic to bother us. The council approved the use of the property for a model flying field.

At the next meeting Clarence Delor made a motion to purchase, the motion passed and March 6, 1972 we made an offer to buy. A counter offer was made and at the May meeting we learned that the contract had been signed and we were the proud owners of an 18 acre "Model Aircraft Flying Field" for \$18,000 dollars. A motion was made by Ken Sulkowski to name the site Schwartz Field in honor of our president. The motion passed. . An assessment of \$100.00 per member for ten years was the way the club decided to pay for the field.

A planning committee headed by Steve Sauger surveyed the site and decided to have a temporary strip cut while work was being done on the main flying area. This temporary strip was on the south side of the main field. It was bounded on the north by a deep ditch and on the south by a fence and a line of trees. A culvert was put in by the county. The club had obtained a garage located in Oakland County, courtesy of Chet Brady. It was dismantled and trucked to the field. Footings were put in by the club members and the garage was raised on November 27. A new roof was put on and an access road built. The main field had been plowed and seeded and would be flyable the next year, so we decided to host a contest. It would be a pattern and scale event and would be scheduled for June 29 & 30, 1973.

The June contest had a very good turnout and was a success ---BUT--- that was when our trouble started. Complaints had been lodged with the Casco Twp. by the people that lived about a half mile from the field. But they still complained about over flights and noise.

The over flights were caused by the setup for pattern maneuvers the pilots used when doing their designated maneuvers. They would fly well past the field, do a split-s and then come in for the maneuver. This was a common practice for a standard procedure. The trouble was that the field was a little too small. And we had no over flight privileges. As for the noise, the muffler rule would be strictly enforced.

In spite of our efforts, the field was closed down by court order on August 20, 1973. Allegations had been made that an airplane had crashed on the expressway causing an accident. This was completely unfounded. The complainant also produced a portion of a wing and said it had been found on someone's property. Club members who saw it said that it had been one put in our trash bin and someone had taken it out.

The result of this was a lawsuit filed against the RCCD and our "pseudo airport". The case was heard in Port Huron and the court ruled in favor of the club. It stated that we had reasonable right to enjoyment of our hobby. They did say, however, that we would have to keep our flying confined to the limits of our field. There were no problems for the balance of the year. We did notice that a car was parked on the fence line keeping track of our flying.

June 24, 1974, a special meeting was called to inform the membership that the field was permanently closed. This was an action taken by the executive committee. There had been an incident at the field the previous Sunday. A plane flown by one of the newer members had gone down on the property to the east of us. The farmer came storming onto the field. He was very, very angry and very, very big. Mike Petrilli talked to him and did his best to calm him down. We decided that it would be best to close down and sell the property rather than have continual trouble of this sort. Eighteen acres just wasn't enough room for proper operation.

The field was put up for sale. We were asking \$4000.00 down and the buyer to take over the existing mortgage. We got \$1732.05 and the buyer took over the mortgage. We took quite a beating on this deal with our field shares being worth about four or five dollars. The members could take payment on the shares or donate them to the club.

There we were no field again! Chet Brady said that he knew of a sod farm that we might be able to use as a flying site. It was located on 26 Mile Rd, west of North Avenue. A second option was mentioned by John Fotiu. This being a farm south of us on 26 Mile Rd. owned by Laverne Grewe, and he would be willing to let us use it as a flying field. A work party went to this field and cut a temporary strip. We managed to do a little flying off this field but would need a road and culvert before becoming fully useable. We did use this site for a short time until the arrangements were made with Ed Kogelman for the use of his sod farm.

## CHAPTER 3

### Sod Farm Field

Ed Kogelman's Creek side Sod Farm was chosen as our primary field because we would need no additional work or expense to have a flying site. We would not fly off the grass but would be using the portion of the field that had been harvested. That meant we would have to move our flight line once or twice a season. This was no problem; we would rotate around the farm. The regulations were simple: no flying off the grass, no driving on the grass, and no flying over neighbor's houses.

Ed was an airplane enthusiast. His farm had been used as an emergency field by the pilots from Selfridge Field and P-47s, P-51s, etc. had made emergency landings. He wanted to learn to fly RC planes. He went out of his way for us and helped us in any way he could, so, we showed him our appreciation by making him an honorary member of the club and at Christmas presented him with a gift of a radio and plane. We started flying there in 1975 and flew at this site for about six years.

Everything seemed to be going along smoothly. The field was wide open and flat, the only problem was that there was a lot of dust. Filters were mandatory if you wanted to keep your engines running right. We held many pylon, scale, and fun fly events while we were there. Then once again we were shut down. Ed had been forced to do so because a plane had gone down across 26 Mile Rd. and landed on the front lawn of a neighbor's property. Worse yet, the owner was working on the front lawn at the time.<sup>13</sup>

When the pilot went to pick up his plane he didn't apologize or say anything to her, he just picked it up and left. Very bad PR. The plane had been flown too many times that day and the battery pack was depleted. The number of flights on a flight pack must be closely monitored and an expanded scale voltmeter should be used. Flying fields are hard to come by, especially with conditions as good as this one and we can not afford to lose them in this manner. Ed had been a very good host and had treated us very well. He was sorry to have to shut us down but he had no choice. So there we were, looking for another field.

## Chapter 4

### DNR Field

We had lost the sod farm on June 2, and on the next week end Ed Pokzywinski and Bob Kuczynski decided to drive around and see if they could find something that could be used as a flying field. They came upon a Department of Natural Resources field that was being used as a put-and-take pheasant hunting preserve. This type of hunting is only for several month's each fall. The rest of the time the field was idle. They thought this might have possibilities.

On June 8th Ed called the national parks supervisor, John Weiler, and stated our case. Mr. Weiler met us on the property and we discussed whether or not we could use the field as a flying site. Mr. Weiler was most co-operative, and even suggested that we could have the use of the garage for our tractor and other equipment. Rent on the field was set at 100.00 per year. The club would have to put in a culvert and a gate that was built to DNR specs. In addition, during hunting season there would be no flying in the morning, whether or not hunters were on the field. We would be allowed to put in a gravel road but no asphalt air strip.

We brought our tractor and mower to the field and cut the heavy growth of sweet clover and alfalfa. This gave us a problem of how to dispose of the cuttings. Several weeks later while talking to one of the horse owners that lived out there we found out that what we had cut up and threw away was top notch horse fodder and they would have been willing to cut and bale it for free as long as they could use it for their horses. Oh well, live and learn.

Bob Kuczynski contacted the county and they put in a culvert for us at a cost of about \$500.00. Club members constructed a gate according to DNR specifications at a cost of about \$290.00. We cut a temporary strip and made our first flights off the new field on July 7, 1982. Ken Sulkowski had the honor of being the first to fly off the new field. We were back in business!

Bob Babisch had a friend that had a sod farm nearby and would be willing to plow, disc and seed the field for us. This was BMY (before Mel Yager) he's worth his weight in K&B 40's, so treat him right. We used a temporary strip at the west end of the field while work was being done on the main strip. We had a very dry summer and had a major problem with cracks on the field. The flight strip we were using faced east and ran north and south. This setup was ideal as long as the original ranger was there. The house he

lived in was on the north side of the field, just across 27 Mile Rd., he didn't spend much time there and the airplanes didn't bother him. Nothing lasts forever, he was transferred and a new ranger moved in. The new ranger complained of the noise and over flights. It was necessary to move the flight line so it faced south and ran east and west. This meant we had the sun in our eyes between eleven and four o'clock. The other problem

was that this section of the field had not been worked on as much as the prior strip and would have to be reworked. There was some trouble getting the farmer out to the field to do some more disking and mowing since this was his busy time of the season. It was finally decided that the club members would seed and fertilize the field themselves. We did so in the fall and lucked out and got three weeks of rain which caused the seed to become firmly rooted and ready for spring.

A secondary problem with the field maintenance was the horses that were ridden across the field during the spring when the ground was soft. Some very deep holes were put in the grass and had to be reseeded every year. One other major problem we had was vandalism. Lee Schmalenberg had built a sturdy impound rack. One day someone came out there and repeatedly ran his vehicle into the unit until there was nothing left but kindling. This was in 1985. Our locks had been shot off a number of times, and in 1987 they were cut off with a torch.

Other than for the occasional acts of vandalism the field was shaping up very nicely. We were beginning to enjoy flying off a nice smooth surface when a house was constructed to the south of us. The new neighbor began to complain that we were flying too close to his house. We moved the flight line again, this time to the south part of the field. We had the strip running northwest by southeast and faced northeast.

Back in 1983 we had a road put in and now it had to be extended. This was done in 1989. We had a first class impound rack built by Dick Frye, you'd need a tank to bust this one up, and in 1990 another addition to our field was a safety chain link fence behind the flight line to protect the spectators. Norm Zielinski was the head of our field committee at this time and did a fine job.

The DNR had stopped using the area for put and take pheasant hunting and it was then dedicated as a state park.

In the next few years we conducted many scale, pylon, and fun fly events. The ranger and her husband were transferred up north, (something they had been trying to do for some time), so we didn't have to worry about flying over their house. We had the garage to ourselves and stored all of our equipment there. We also had a telephone installed in the garage after a near tragic incident happened on the field. We were running a scale contest, with Mike Petrilli as the Contest Director, when all of a sudden Mike had a heart attack. Some of the members went to the houses of several of our neighbors, but they were not home, and they had to go to several more houses before they found someone home and were able to summon help. Luckily two of the contestants were doctors, Burton Eisenberg and \_\_\_\_\_. For saving his life they were made honorary members of the club.

On May 4, 1993, about 2:00AM, an arsonist set fire to our garage, burning it to the ground and destroying much of our equipment. He also vandalized our shelter, scribbled an obscene message on one of the tables, and tried to burn the impound rack and anything else that would burn. Some of the items we were able to salvage and some were completely destroyed. Since the garage was not owned by us, but by the

State of Michigan, they posted a \$5000.00 reward for information leading to his arrest and conviction. He has not been caught yet, but, once an arsonist – always an arsonist. He was to strike four more times.

The Park Service decided to raze the house and clean up what was left of the garage. They had developed a master plan for Wetzel Park, and among the agenda, plans to move the flying field to the north of 27 Mile Rd.

Club president Darrell Rohrbeck along with Willie McMath and Mel Yager felt this would be a perfect time to move our field to the north side of 27 Mile Road. He contacted the Park Commission and receives the OK to proceed. In 1993 we began work by plowing and seeding the area.

On Friday, August 27, 1993, history was made. It was a hot muggy afternoon, with a temperature of 96 degrees, when Willie McMath made the first flight from the new field. The plane was his Q-500, Bat Man Special. Two club members were witness to this event, Mel Yager and Bill Hackett.

Darrell attended meeting after meeting with the D.N.R.; Ed headed the field committee and engineered the move. Mel brush hogged, leveled, scraped, and rolled the field. We had hired Clarence Klonski the same man we bought our tractor in 1963 from to do the initial plowing, disking, fertilizing and seeding.

July 30 & 31 1995 was designated as moving day. A hard working crew of RCCD members began moving our impound, shelter and chain link fence, to the other side of 27 Mile Rd. They did a really remarkable job of moving and placing all of the units on the new site. To get this all together took a lot of hard work by many people, not the least of which was Darrell Rohrbeck, Ed Barbier and Mel Yager.

Donald Kroening had contacted a company that had semi-trailers for sale, and a shipping case company to see if these units could be used as storage shed on our field. They were usable, and after an OK by the membership, he had them delivered to the field. The wheels were taken off the trailer, a lattice framework was put around the base of the trailer, and the shipping case and trailer were painted. The work was done by Dave and Paul Wagensomer, they were new members but they jumped right in and did a lot of work for the club. Some of their efforts can be seen in our new impound rack, backboard, etc.

On August 21<sup>st</sup> we hosted our “Third Annual Great Lakes Scale Contest.” We had a fine event and Mariano Alfafara outdid himself as contest director.

On August 22, 1995 our resident pyromaniac struck again. He broke the hasps off the trailer and shipping case, doused the trailer with gasoline, and burned everything we had in there. Darrell received a call about 6:30 A.M. from one of our neighbors who was out jogging and had seen the fire. The fire and sheriff’s department were there and talked to Darrell who was interviewed by a TV news channel and there was a write-up in the newspapers. No arrests were made, although we and the police have a pretty good

idea who it is, but you almost have to catch him in the act. The Crime Stoppers Organization has offered a \$1000.00 reward for his arrest and conviction. The arsonist not only burned our property, but he also stole several hundred dollars worth of pop cans we had from the contest and were going to return. Our neighbors around the field are very fine people and have given us a lot of help, there's just one bad apple.

Since then we have had some good flying off the new field, and expect to have a class A field by next year.

Our meeting location has been changed from the Lanse Creuse High School to the Rosso Memorial Hall on Town Hall Rd. This is where our newly elected president Dave Wagensomer will preside in 1996. Assisting him will be Jim Bungard as secretary, Bob Lawrence as vice-president, and Steve Surbaugh as treasurer.

The park was named W. C, Wetzel State Park, Pfc. Wetzel was a WWII hero from Roseville and the only Congressional Medal of Honor recipient from Macomb County. He sacrificed his life while saving his platoon from a German grenade.

In 1997 a memorial was built on the RCCD flying field in honor of Pfc. Walter C. Wetzel. On August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1997 the dedication took place, complete with a band, politicians making speeches, a VFW color guard, a food vender and lots of well wishers including Walter's relatives. The Radio Control Club of Detroit flying field was officially named "Wetzel Memorial Flying Field".

After the ceremony the head of DNR in south eastern Michigan took several flights on the buddy box system. He enjoyed the flying the food and was very impressed with our club and our use of the field.

# Chapter Five

## Summary

Any club is the sum of its members, and we have had some nationally known members and many who were not as well known nationwide, but all were important to the club. We became the type of club we are because of the combined efforts of all our members. At first the club started out as a group of modelers who just wanted to go out, get an airplane in the air, and watch it fly, while making corrections or maneuvers via radio control. Later these "corrections" were to become more and more precise, and with the advent of better equipment these maneuvers were to take on a specific format or pattern. The term "pattern" was applied to contests that rated the way a specific maneuver was performed. In addition to pattern events the RCCD held many scale, pylon and rudder only events.

Some of our earlier members were people like Ernie Kratzet who started the club in 1952 and was made an honorary member in 1967, Mel Santmyers now living in California, Chuck Winter also living in California, Helen Brett who was our club secretary for eight years and who handles all of our incorporation papers. Willie McMath and Ed Iash both charter members.

Member Russ Preston won the rudder only nationals in 1962. Later on we had top notch flyers like Howard Mottin. Special mention should be made of Tom Brett. He was one of our early presidents (1962-1964), and was one of the first of our club flyers to become a nationally known pattern flyer. Tom came in third in the 1961 nationals in pattern and in 1962 he won the World Pattern Championship in England. He was the designer of a number of excellent pattern planes. It is sad to say he is no longer with us; he passed away on December 29, 1974. After this many years it is difficult to name them all, but they are what makes a club what it is.

Later, pylon racing became a very big club activity, due in no little measure to Dave Keats. Dave, along with John Krauer and John Fotiu were very active in Formula One, Quarter Midget, and Quickie 500 racing. Dave won many of the races he entered, and was responsible for running most of the pylon events hosted by the RCCD. John Fotiu won the Canadian Quarter Midget Nationals and designed several well known quarter midget planes. John Krauer flew many Quickie 500 contests and was an excellent scale builder and flyer.

The RCCD became very involved in scale contests, and why not, we had some of the best scale builders in the country, bar none. There were builder/flyers like Mel Santmyers, Steve Sauger, Skip Mast, Cliff Tacie, Stan Dzon, Ken Hudik, and Dick Fryer.

Steve Sauger's aircraft were superb creations of the full scale aircraft. He won the Nationals and made the AMA international team. Steve went to Norway with the team and there he observed that the Russian modelers really knew their "stuff". One thing they didn't know about at that time was instant glue. One of our group demonstrated

how good it was by gluing the fingers of one of the Russians together (with their permission). They thought this was hilarious. Some of the planes that Steve built were the Stinson Orion, the plane used by the Detroit News, it even had a miniature typewriter in the cabin and the paint was from the original paint stock used by the News. Also built was a tri-motored Stinson and an Aeronca, every one a masterpiece.

Skip Mast built a great many beautiful scale aircraft, such as the North American P-51, but his main love seems to be multi-engine aircraft. I (Bob Kuczynski) remember one day that he looked at one of my planes, a biplane and commented that it was nice, but, if I would take off one wing and add three more engines I would really have something. Skip then built a DC-3 and flew it in one of our sport pylon events, don't laugh, he won every event he entered.

He then built the Boeing B-29, a very nice flying airplane, and rumor has it that he entered it in a pattern contest. No information on how well he did. The plane was supposed to go to the AMA museum, he was giving it one last flight when he lost a couple of engines, both on the same side, and the plane spun in. He repaired it and sent it to the AMA.

One of his better known designs was the Hercules C-130. Three different versions were built. The first two were finished in Coast Guard colors and the third in desert camouflage. The first C-130 was a good flying aircraft, but when Skip decided to enter it in the Internationals, he found it was above the weight limit for international contests. He thought it would be easier to build a new plane rather than try to pare five pounds off the original. He got the weight down to 13 lbs and this is the one he flew at France's Le ourget airport. The French couldn't believe that a plane that large could weigh just 13 lbs. they re-weighed it after every flight. Skip won the Canadian Nationals several times and the U.S. Nationals

Tom McCoy built many radio assisted free flight models that won many awards at the Toledo Expositions. The wood work on his models was so fine that it was a shame to cover them. Cliff Tacie constructed some wonderful scale airplanes and was selected for the internationals. He also wrote a very good column for model magazines. He moved to Maryland but we still consider him a member.

John Fotiu was Canadian National Champion in Quarter Midget in 1975.

Stan Dzon is one of the newer scale masters. Some of his large aircraft, the jets and his STOL Caribou and Lockheed Hudson aircraft have to be seen to be appreciated. The retracting landing gear on his Caribou cost over \$900.00.

The Great Lakes Scale contest, and the Big Bird contests, through the efforts of Mike Hric, Ken Hudik, and Mariano Alfafara have become contests that have been very well attended by the modelers in the area.

Howard Mottin is a world class pattern flyer, Class C expert.

Dave Keats was the person most responsible for the RCCD's pylon events. He won many, many races. He flew many Formula 1 aircraft, these were scale racing planes and the finish on them was a work of art. He ran almost all of our pylon events, even after he quit competitive racing.

Back in the early 70's when Dave wanted a helicopter he designed and built one. In the summer of 1973 Dave flew a demo flight for the club members in the parking lot of the church where we had our meetings. At this time there were very few if any people flying choppers in the world. There was a nice construction on article in R/C Modeler magazine in the August 74 issue. Dave's Polcat now rests in the AMA Museum in Muncie IN. He also is the founder of the Michigan Whirlybirds, past president of the CAN AMPS & he helped start the AMRCC.

Clarence DeLor had an idea and in 1977 started something he called our First Annual Mini-Toledo and ran it for 18 years. The Mini-Toledo is one of our yearly events yet today.

Dave Pinegar is another top notch builder and flyer, and a first rate helicopter pilot. His planes are always light, strong, and good flyers.

Our new president in 1996 Dave Wagensomer, got wind of the politituiond wanting to sell Wetzel State Park to developers for a golf course. He came up with the idea of bringing it to public attention by building a memorial to the war hero at our flying site. The public was invited to the dedication, we a large tent set up, we had politicians speaking, a high school band playing, the VFW Color Guard marching and the Boy Scouts helping park cars and direct traffic. It turned out to be quite of an event. PFC Walter C. Wetzel's family was also in attendance. Dave also started a group calling it self the Friends of W.C. Wetzel State Park. It's made up of neighbors, sportsmen, RCCD members and concerned citizens; they kind of help in the park and do what ever they can. Dave also started the Combat Pilots Association.

If you are ever in the new Macomb County Office Building in Mt. Clemens, there is a bust or PFC Wetzel in front of the elevators on the ground floor. Our club name is on the plate in recognition of our efforts.

## Chapter Six

### RCCD – Starting the next 50 Years

A club that began in 1953 was bigger and stronger than ever in 2003. For a club that started with a few guys that had a mutual love for airplanes and flying, getting together on a casual basis and working with basic equipment, a truly great club has emerged. After 50 years we were 250 plus strong, flying from one of the best sites in the Midwest, and using equipment that could not have even dreamed of 50 years ago. Equipment that started out costing upwards of a \$1,000.00 dropped to a modest price of about \$200.00. This put R/C flying within the range of almost everyone. Granted, it may be a little steep for the average young enthusiast, but with the help of the parents it is still within an affordable range.

Dave Wagonsomer was our president in 1996 and 97. He started the RCCD website in 1996. Kenneth Sulkowski took it over in 1997 and was webmaster until 2005 when Scott Pavlock took over for a year then it was handled by Larry Parker, and then Mike Androse. Ken Sulkowski again took over as webmaster until Noel Hunt came along and took the reigns in 2009. Noel redesigned the page into the top notch website we have today, seeing 18,000 visits in that year.

While Dave Wagonsomer was president some of our politicians came up with the idea of selling off Wetzel Park to developers for a golf course. Dave came up with a brilliant idea of erecting a National Monument in the park for PFC Walter Wetzel. PFC Walter Wetzel is the recipient of the Congressional Metal of Honor. It turned out to be quite of an event. We had a high school band playing, Boy Scouts directing traffic, Veterans Color Guard presenting the US Flag and yes some Politicians giving speeches. A Large tent was erected chairs set up to get people out of the hot sun. Some of the Wetzel's family was in attendance. The monument now stands with a flag pole at our field and is registered as such in Washington D C.

We were fortunate to have several good hobby shops in our area, namely The Prop Shop, the two Riders Hobby shops and P&D Hobbies. Each has helped immensely in the promotion of the hobby/sport. Their assistance to the newcomer and to clubs has been excellent. Their support in club activities with the donation of many planes and supplies has aided in many club projects and fund raising activities.

In 1997 Dave Pinegar started our annual swap shop. The event has always been late in January. Later it was organized by Sam Monteleone, by Ken Sulkowski, by Keith Jones and then by Bob Hunt in 2009. We are at our third location and still going strong.

For over ten years RCCD has had a show at the Macomb Shopping Mall. In 2011 management at the mall said no more shows. Through the years, our efforts introduced our hobby to the general public. With upwards of a hundred aircraft on display, building demos and a flight simulator plus a large number of members there to answer questions, this two-day event was very successful. Gordon Gibbons, who was

responsible for club PR, managed to move the show to the Gibraltar Trade Center in 2011.

Of course we could write a whole book about fellow member contributions and specially the club officers, past and present. At 50 years the club leadership consisted of President Ernie Varilone, Vice President Jimmy Conrad, Secretary Jay Lawless and Treasurer Don Veres II

# Chapter Seven

## Beyond 50 Years

Added by Kenneth Sulkowski and Noel Hunt

History has a habit of continuing! And RCCD continues to add to its history.

While most of the club events moved away from a competition based format to more of a fly-for-fun format, a group of members remained intensely competitive in the Combat arena. Don Veres II, Keith Jones and Scott Gilkey ensure that combat events appear on the club schedule each year. RCCD pilots are always top contenders locally and nationally, culminating with Brian Gilkey dominating all the classes at the Nat's in 2008. Brother Eric took one class in 2009, preventing another sweep.

Kids' nights were introduced in 2002 and under Paul Garceau's guidance, many kids from local foster and shelter homes had an opportunity to try R/C model aviation. After a talk on safety and basic operation, usually by Russ Hope, each child got an opportunity on the sticks of a buddy box with one of the club's intro pilots. While they are not flying, the kids built rubber-powered free-flight planes, under supervision of other club members. Rainel Verres ensured that everyone participating was treated to a hot dog meal. There was never a shortage of volunteers for these evenings because they were also enjoyed by the members.

For 7 years, president Ernie Varilone led the club through a time of change: The influences of the Internet, ARFs and then electric-powered models, saw hobby shops close, a decline of builders in favor of flyers, and an explosion of planes and equipment specifically aimed at electric-powered model aircraft.

In 2007, Bill Oberdieck, AMA's district VII VP, approached RCCD with a proposal to host a District VII fly-in. With 4 months to plan, RCCD hosted about 75 pilots from many District VII clubs and found a way to accommodate U-control flying, helicopters and general R/C aviation in its many forms, from IMAA size to foamy electrics. It was such a great success that Bill challenged other clubs to follow the tradition. No other club has yet stepped up to the challenge.

In 2006 Kenneth Sulkowski came up with the idea of purchasing a commemorative brick in the AMA's Walk of Fame. A fund was started and when we had about 50% of the funds the collection slowed down and then came to a halt. At one of the meetings a long time and well respected member Ed Barber pledged the rest of the money to cover the brick. Thanks to Ed generosity a brick with RCCD's name is in the AMA walk for ever.

Another field-use scare occurred in 2008 when a long-term Wetzel State Park usage plan proposed that radio control model aviation and hunting were inconsistent with that plan. Club members rallied together with the other major group of park users, the hunters, and pressured the planners to restate the plan. Under that pressure the plan

was re-written and our flying field on the north side of 27 Mile road was safe, at least for a few more years.

RCCD saw a young member, Scott Pavlock grow to become a very accomplished pilot and proponent of “electrics”. He and his father, Mike, introduced an electric only event in May of 2006 and by 2009 it was the club’s most well attended event, attracting visitors from many clubs in the area. There is no doubt that electric model aircraft are here to stay. Watts Over Wetzel is likely to become a regular event on RCCD’s schedule.

Now in our sixth decade, RCCD is as strong as ever. That strength is derived in the same way as in the past: We continue to have terrific members and we can look forward to reading the next entry in this RCCD club history.

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