

NEW BEGINNING AGAIN

EAA Chapter 99, Vero Beach, Florida

Chapter 99 of Vero Beach, FL was formed fairly early in the history of EAA but apparently did not manage to keep active for more than a few years. In 1966 a number of people were hired by Piper Aircraft to start a new program and relocated to Vero Beach. Among them were several national EAA members. These new people along with the remaining members of the original Chapter 99 reorganized and incorporated into EAA Indian River Chapter 99, Inc. of Vero Beach, FL. With new strength and purpose the Chapter started to move forward.

At first meetings were held in the new officers homes. Then as word got around that Chapter 99 was active again, a local businessman donated a basket case J-3 Cub to the group. Parts to the aircraft were taken home by members to recondition and recover them individually and when ready were all gathered at one members backyard shop to finish. A hangar was secured at a small airport south of town where it was finally assembled. A flying club was organized within the chapter to operate the aircraft. This brought additional members and helped strengthen the chapter. The hangar gave the members a place to congregate on Saturday mornings for routine maintenance on the aircraft, fun flying and what ever else seemed appropriate.

Since the chapter grew too large to hold meetings in private homes, through the next several years regular chapter meetings were held at a meeting room at Piper, classrooms at several flying schools, the local high school and several other places which escape memory at this time. During this period the chapter held fly-ins just about every year at one of the local airports in the county. These events were well attended by EAA members from Chapter 99 and other chapters who participated in flying events such as Short Field Take Offs, Spot Landings, Bomb Drops and Balloon Bursting. Although popular at the time, these events had to be discontinued due to liability concerns. The chapter also assisted local civic organizations to put on several air shows.

When Sun 'N Fun started, Merle Shoaf (now deceased), a Chapter 99 member was instrumental in initiating the Corn Roast there. The first couple of years it was only a weekend event and the Corn Roast was a social gathering in the evenings for the volunteers. As Sun 'N Fun grew the Corn Roast took on a life of its own and required the efforts of the whole chapter. It became a very popular feature for all attendees. Besides roasting corn, Merle organized evening entertainment including musicians from Chapter 99 and visiting volunteers. Finally about 1995 it was more than the small chapter could handle and had to give it up to a larger chapter from Deland, Florida who still manages it today.

In 1973 a careless chapter member put the Cub on its back in tall grass in the marsh west of Vero Beach. It was again disassembled, repaired and recovered by chapter members. It was refinished in original colors and had an 85 horsepower engine. An ideal airplane for the small flying club. It flew many hours until in 1986 due to a power loss it ended in a citrus grove and was severely damaged. This time there were not enough members interested in a major project so the remains were sold. Without the airplane and without a permanent meeting place interest waned and the chapter membership was reduced to a handful of diehards. However, the diehards

persisted and managed to hold regular meetings and even have an occasional event such as a Young Eagles Rally or cookout at a private home in an airstrip community west of town.

That is until recently when the Vero Beach Airport Commission and the city fathers finally got together and decided to build a much needed T-hangar complex on the city's airport. There are now 28 T-hangars for small single engine aircraft and 5 large executive hangars for corporate type aircraft available on Vero Beach Airport. After hearing the airport managers comment that he, "Would like to see an EAA presence on the field," the almost dormant chapter woke up and went into action. By renting one of the T-hangars, the chapter has the privilege of using a large meeting room or pilots lounge which was built into the complex. Chapter 99 now had a permanent home to hold meetings or conduct any other EAA related activities. The first was an open house held on Saturday July 13, 2002.

The open house was a great success. There was complimentary coffee, juice and pastry, door prizes and exhibits from airport businesses and other organizations. On display were experimental, vintage and certified aircraft. There were antique and classic automobile and radio controlled aircraft displays by local clubs. The event was well attended by local residents. Although there was no Young Eagles activity that day, 31 youngsters were signed up for a future date and several new members joined the chapter.

On Saturday September 28, 2002, a Pancake Breakfast and Young Eagles Rally was held. The breakfast was held as a fund raiser and social event. Besides chapter members, there were a number of nonmember supporters from a notice in the local newspaper. The day was perfect for the event. The weather could not have been better, the wind was calm with a CAVU completely cloudless sky. 6 pilots with their aircraft were available for the Young Eagles flights along with several chapter members for ground instruction. 12 youngsters ranging in age from 8 to 17 made flights. A small beginning perhaps but similar events are scheduled to be held the fourth Saturday of each month and hopefully in time the numbers will grow.

An unplanned feature of the event was the first flight of Ken Mishlers experimental Velocity which he had just completed several days before. The first flight was made by an experienced Velocity test pilot. Having found everything normal, the second flight was made with the test pilot in the right seat and the builder at the controls. The look of pride and the feeling of relief was obvious in the grin on the face of the builder. Those attending got to see first hand a little bit of what EAA is all about.

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