



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of RICHARD (RICH) D. HANSON



Written by JR (2013); reformatted and edited by JS (05/2014)

The following was submitted by Jim Rice for Rich Hanson's AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame nomination form. Rich was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2013.

Few people make such an impact on their profession so as to be considered world-renowned in their field. Even fewer make that same impact in the field of their avocation. Rich Hanson has made that impact on model aviation through a lifetime of dedicated and professional contributions both as a volunteer on the Academy of Model Aeronautics board of directors as the District X Vice President, and more recently as the AMA Government and Regulatory Affairs Representative.

A quick look at Rich's life will prove that if it is about aviation (full scale or model), he is all in:

From 8th through 12th grades, he was in the Civil Air Patrol. Upon graduation he enlisted in the Army and attended Helicopter Flight School, after which he served tours in Vietnam. He remained in the Army National Guard after he departed active duty, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and continuing on flight status. He joined the Arizona Department of Public Safety in 1973 as a helicopter pilot and held various positions of increasing importance with the ADPS, finally retiring as Commander of Aviation and serving the Department's Criminal Justice Support Bureau. He also flew helicopter tours at the Grand Canyon on his days off while working in Flagstaff.

Rich has earned AMA's Distinguished Service Award as Vice President of District X and was also presented the Meritorious Service Award. He is one of select few who have received the AMA Fellowship Award for long and distinguished service to the Academy. The Fellowship Award is the highest honor AMA can bestow on an individual.

Rich is a fine modeler in his own right, having been a competitor in both pylon and Warbird Racing for many years. He was a great competitor and advocate for all racing enthusiasts. He managed to maintain a keen interest in modeling while serving our country in the US Army, Army National Guard, and with the Arizona DPS.

As the District VP, he represented both the concerns and needs of his district properly while considering the needs of the entire Academy, a sometimes difficult if not impossible task. His convincing presentations coupled with his organized thoughts always resulted in timely and accurate actions, whether as a committee member, a district representative, or just an avid modeling member of the AMA. He spent countless hours working through tough issues, helping to mold the AMA over a period of 15 years as it became the great organization that it is today.

Key programs with his fingerprints all over them are the Club Disaster Relief program, which helps clubs who have suffered a natural disaster as they try to regain use of their flying site, the Special Interest Group (SIG) Committee, which he chaired for many years, AMA Bylaws Committee as Chairman, as a significant member of the Safety Committee for several years, and a key player in the development and implementation of the Flying Site Development/Improvement Grant program, which assists clubs monetarily with flying site improvements.

At the height of his performance as a District X VP, Rich resigned his position and, during a critical time in AMA's relationship with the FAA, accepted the challenge to help AMA develop the position of Government and Regulatory Affairs Representative. As a result, Rich was selected to sit on the FAA's Aviation Rulemaking Committee as AMA's representative to that group. Their mission was to draft an outline for the soon-to-be-developed Federal Aviation Rule, which would integrate small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS) into the National Airspace System (NAS). During those discussions, he defended AMA's position by touting its nearly 75 year record of safety which is unmatched in the aviation world. Often backed into a corner by virtue of the fact that he was the sole model aircraft expert/enthusiast at the table, he had the fortitude and tenacity to persevere and be heard on the subject of model aircraft safety.

He was so successful in his efforts that at one point the FAA developed the position that they would regulate model aircraft by exempting it from regulation. It appeared that our case was won and his efforts had saved the day, but that was very short lived. Powers to be in the FAA camp changed and so did the position on model aircraft. They decided to include model aircraft in a special section of the rule they were drafting and put all model aviation in a fairly small, tight box; a circumstance that no one on AMA's Executive Council was willing to accept.

It became obvious that a constant interface was necessary to remain in touch with the processes involved in development and publication of FAA's new rule. Rich was the clear choice to lead that effort. Many calls, teleconferences, and visits with FAA left the picture less clear than it had been before. The rule was going to seriously and adversely affect modeling and, if the AMA wanted to impact that, the FAA would require the development of an extensive set of Standards to be followed by modelers which would allow operations outside of those outlined in the rule. This became a truly moving target as meeting after meeting was attended in Washington, DC in an effort to pin down the way to create and then execute these standards.

A work group of volunteers who are recognized experts in all facets of modeling and model aircraft safety was established with Rich as the lead. Weekly meetings were conducted to prepare draft after draft of a document that might satisfy the bureaucratic needs of the FAA. Rich persisted in his efforts with the FAA until they assigned a three-member team to work with the AMA work group, trying to iron out details of the standards. The problem was that they knew what the rule would likely say when it was published but were forbidden by law to provide AMA with that information, so they were attempting to guide our efforts without violating that law.

That became a nearly insurmountable task as the FAA representatives had almost no knowledge of model aviation from sizes, types, speeds, field requirements, competitions, or general safety. They imposed their knowledge of full scale aviation and their regulator persona on the work group at every turn, making progress slow and tedious, but Rich was steadfast and resilient. He

restarted our efforts several times when educational briefs and debate were rebuffed. The work group followed his lead in the interest of a successful conclusion to the 4 year effort. At the three-year point, Rich and others developed the basis for an amendment to a public law being developed in Washington. The law was the "FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012" and it gave AMA a small window of opportunity to be heard in a different way by the FAA. The result of that effort was a very prominent rider, if you will, to Public Law 112-95: "Special Rule for Model Aircraft."

The language in this provision instructs the FAA Administrator to not enact rules affecting model aircraft activity conducted within the safety programming of a nationwide community-based organization. This was a significant change which severely changed our stature with the FAA team, putting us on a more level playing field. It also troubled many of the FAA representatives, causing them to shut off our "cooperative" work efforts. For over 6 months, the AMA work group worked without communication from/to the FAA staff and developed a single document that outlined every aspect of AMA's Safety Programming in a very professional manner.

The AMA Safety Document was presented to the FAA at a face to face meeting in DC where it was requested for at least the third time that the FAA approve the use of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations wherein the FAA would acknowledge our document as the Safety Program of a Community Based Organization. There was again some resistance to this suggestion, as the staffers still wanted an extensive set of standards; standards which would be awkward at best and restrictive at worst. However, the new managers in the office agreed to take the issue to their lawyers for a decision.

After several weeks, the answer was received that the preparation of an MOU would be acceptable, so he and a new team set about preparing a draft MOU and letter to present with the Safety Program Document to both recognize AMA as a Community Based Organization and accept the Safety Program as a viable means of safely integrating model and full scale aviation in the National Airspace System.

I have sat in most of the meetings with Rich, observing his team leading abilities and his presentation skills, and have marveled at his patience, resilience, genius, tenacity and amazingly always positive attitude. He has traveled to Washington at least 10 times on this effort and around the country to various venues where meetings were being held or where his input might be beneficial. Most of these travels were at the most inopportune times, flying on "red-eye" flights as he used employee standby tickets he earned as a retired US Air Employee. This significantly reduced expenses to AMA for his travels but left him stranded several times and bleary eyed at some meetings.

I have also talked with him on conference calls and webinars while he was vacationing with his wife in Canada, England, and on a cruise ship in the Caribbean. Most would not have the motivation to interrupt their vacation for such activity and would not have been as understanding a wife as his wife, Ann!

The new public/media scare concerning "Drones" has brought a great deal of negative publicity

toward the capability of gathering aerial imagery from small Unmanned Aerial Systems (sUASs), including model aircraft, and that has energized several states to propose laws to regulate or terminate that ability for the average citizen. These laws in many cases severely endanger the opportunity for AMA members to fly model aircraft. Rich has developed a portion of the AMA website dedicated to educating members and the public, and to support modelers/clubs as they try to impact or resolve the impact of these laws in their states. This is quickly becoming a near full-time operation in itself, and a favorable outcome in every state is essential to the future of model aviation.

AMA has had many moments of success throughout its lifetime in advocating for its members and model aviation. One of AMA's most significant achievements was its work with the FCC in acquiring RC frequencies for aeromodelers which, in essence, defined AMA and its value to the model aviation community. Arguably, Rich's work in leading the effort to protect model aviation and AMA members from unnecessary regulation by the FAA rises to this level, and will most certainly be recorded as one of the most significant achievements in AMA's history.

While these processes are still ongoing as I write this nomination, I believe that it is clear that Rich Hanson's efforts on behalf of all the model aviation - but particularly AMA - have been monumental, perhaps even revolutionary.

This nomination is due prior to the resolution of any of the ongoing issues discussed above. Regardless of the final outcome of the MOU with the FAA or his and others' efforts to impact various state laws, I proudly nominate my good friend and a friend of modelers across the country, Rich Hanson, for induction into the AMA Hall of Fame

Jim Rice
Academy of Model Aeronautics
Former District VIII Vice President
District VIII AVP for Safety

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