



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of PAT HARNESS



Written by JG (072012); Added to HP files (08/2013)

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When I made a call to the founder of Triple Tree Aerodrome, Mr. Pat Hartness, he was in Woodruff, South Carolina, grooming the main line on preparation for the 30th anniversary of the world's largest outdoor RC event: Joe Nall 2012.

Pat was nice enough to take a break in the shade and talk to me about the history of the Joe Nall event and to give me some big news that means good things for the entire RC community.

JG: Pat, you started this event in 1983 at your house. I assume you wanted to have your own event so you could have all of your friends over to fly.

PH: I used to go to fly-ins with my best friend, Kirby McKinney. We would find out that the people there seemed to be more interested in telling us what to do, where to park, and how to behave than they did trying to make us have a good time. So we decided we should have our own event. We thought if we had the right attitude, pilots would come back and bring more people. We felt like all we had to do was make sure everyone was going to have a really good time.

JG: Let's talk about the person the event is named after, Joe Nall.

PH: Joe was one of the more exceptional students that Furman University ever had, and he was an exceptional person. He had a photographic memory, was very bright, and was on a full ride to Furman. He loved airplanes and wanted to be a preacher. I introduced him to RC and full-scale flying. We were good friends and roommates at Furman.

As the emcee at the event, he could remember everyone's name. He used his humor and knowledge to keep everyone entertained.

Ultimately, Joe became a lawyer and decided he wanted to become a member of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). His goal was to take computers and avionics and create a better central controlling system for the FAA. His other aspiration was to become the chief of the FAA.

President Reagan liked him so much he made Joe (a Democrat) an NTSB member. He was on official business in Venezuela and died in an airplane crash. After his death, we changed the name of the event to Joe Nall in his memory.

JG: What is it like to go from having a few people at your house in 1983 to hosting the world's largest outdoor event in 2012?

PH: Fortunately, it happened slowly. We had 33 people at our first event and then maybe 150 the second year. As it has grown, we have learned how to run it. Each year we just get more people to help us.

Over the 30 years we have been doing this, we have taken pride in being able to handle the number of people that show up. We have a barbecue each year, and we get everyone through the line in 30 minutes, whether there are 1,000 or 1,200 people.

We had to move from where I used to live to where we are presently. Having 400 acres has really helped. We are using a third of that acreage now, and we think we have enough to take care of anything we might need as we grow in the future.

JG: Tell me about some of the other features of the Triple Tree property.

PH: There is a 50-acre lake that we fly water planes off of. Geographically, it's right about the center of the property. We have the full-scale hangar. The full-size planes are mine.

Some of the models in there have been gifted to us from the families of deceased RC pilots. We honor that, and they will stay in that building unless we have someone help us fund a museum. We will be asking for that at the Nall this year, since we have been granted foundation status.

JG: That is huge news! Let's talk about the foundation status and how that will affect Triple Tree and all of us as RC pilots.

PH: This has been four years in the making. I started visiting my lawyers trying to figure out how it would affect the family. We decided that if we gifted the property we would do it together. So my family and I are gifting the Triple Tree property.

After my death, we are gifting my airplanes and the buildings so that is all becomes part of the property. There will be a rotating board of aviation people who are crazy about RC and full-scale. We are really excited about being able to do this.

Our whole host group in Greenville, South Carolina, is beginning to understand that this is for real. There have been other RC events like this which meant a lot to people.

People would take their holidays to attend them, but then the host would pass away and the event would no longer happen. This happened with the Tournament of Champions. It became very important to the RC world. After Mr. Bennett died a lot of people thought it would continue, but as we found out, there was nothing in place to keep that event going.

The Nall has had 30 years to build up steam. People have come to love it and it seems ridiculous

that it should end if I conk out. My family would have to scramble to pay taxes and try to keep it going. By gifting the Triple Tree property, we solve all of these problems and everything we have at Triple Tree will be here permanently for the future.

All we have to do is make sure we can fund this thing and keep a couple of people out here to mow and maintain the grounds so in the future we can all continue to enjoy Triple Tree and even teach our children and grandchildren how to fly RC there.

I want everyone who is reading or listening to this, to these words, to dream about what we can do if we keep it going. This is for real. It has happened. It's ours to keep and ours to enjoy

JG: Essentially, what you are saying is Triple Tree will belong to the RC community, and it will be our responsibility to financially and physically keep it going.

PH: This is the total truth. We will announce where to go to donate money to Joe Nall this year.

JG: You have been doing this for a long time and have known a lot of modelers. Is there any advice you would like to give to people?

PH: I think you come out here and meet the nicest people that you have ever met, who have a common interest. I have been modeling since I was 7 and flying since I was 10. During Joe Nall week, I try to unwind and sit back and talk to people and get to know them. That's what it is really all about. It's not about engines and radios; it's about the common bond.

Our motto is "fun, fellowship, and hospitality" and we want that to be contagious with every person who attends Joe Nall. We tell pilots to say hello to the person next to them. They might end up being a good friend or even a best friend in two or three years. It's almost corny, but it's absolutely so true.

JG: I've made many of my closest friends at RC events across this country. When I go to Joe Nall, I know most of them will be out there, and that is the thing I look forward to, as well as the beautiful grounds of Triple Tree and the airplanes.

PH: It takes it all. It really does. That was a great question and I really look forward to it like I used to when I was 7 years old, waiting to get my little airplane with a fuel engine on it. I just cannot wait. I'm excited beyond belief and always have been.

Do I fly? Yeah, I have been a member of the AMA since 1956. I'm a lifetime member. I fly models and full-scale. I'm 70 years old and I'm working out so I can be here with you guys 50 more years (joking). It's the fun thing in life. It's the bond that my uncle and my dad taught me when I learned to fly with them, to just have a good time with it.

JG: We appreciate you taking time to talk to us and also creating this event that means so much to so many of us.

PH: I really have enjoyed talking with you. I look forward to getting in your golf cart and driving and dreaming with you, and sharing some time together when you are here.

Sources:

Stan's Photos

www.stansphotos.com

Joe Nall History

<http://www.tripletreeaerodrome.com/history-of-joe-nall.php>

Joe Nall Week

<http://www.tripletreeaerodrome.com/>

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