Biography of Mike Gretz

Born: January 26, 1952

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Mike Gretz
Montezuma, Iowa

Mike Gretz was born January 26, 1952 in Mankato, Minnesota. He got his start in model aviation building balsa gliders and rubber-powered stick models made by American Junior and North Pacific. He thoroughly studied the instructions and experimented with bending the control surfaces. His little modifications enabled his airplanes to fly much better than those his friends built.

Mike's first experience with gas-powered models was observing his uncles, who flew Free Flight and Control Line models. Still a boy at the time, Mike's teenage uncles would not let him play with their previous pieces of work. He instead watched them build and fly. When his family relocated to Waterloo, Iowa in 1960, Mike spent time watching Control Line pilots fly their models in the park a block from his house.

In 1968, Mike purchased his first gas model: a Sterling *Ringmaster* 1/2A Control Line model with a Cox Babe Bee .049 engine. He assembled the model with his younger brother's assistance. In exchange for his help, Mike had to let his brother fly it. The brothers taught themselves how to run the engine and fly the aircraft in only a few days.

His family moved back to Mankato in 1969, where Mike became acquainted with Michael Stott and his father, Arnold, operator of the local hobby shop. Arnold saw his attraction to model airplanes and became his mentor. Mike credits Arnold with showing him that model aircraft could be more than just a hobby.

Mike entered his first contest at age 18. He placed first at the 1970 Mankato Modelers AAA-rated Control Line contest in the Senior Stunt category, flying a hybrid airplane consisting of a salvaged Sid Chipmunk wing and a profile fuselage of his own design.

Mike participated in numerous contests after his first win in Mankato and in 1974, after only six years in the hobby, he competed in his first World Championships, placing fourth overall.

Mike has been a seven-time United States team member as well as the team manager in FAI World Championships competition. He received AMA's FAI Distinguished Performance Award for multiple Scale World Championships and the FAI Scale World Championships honored him with distinguished performance awards in 1976, 1984, 1986, and 1988.

He is the only person to win first place at the AMA Nats in Control Line Scale *and* Radio Control Scale. Mike has been awarded the High Flight Points Award as well as the National

Association of Scale Aeromodelers' Flight Achievement Award a number of times in Scale competition. He has received achievement awards and high static score awards on multiple occasions.

Sig Manufacturing hired Mike in January of 1972 at its headquarters in Montezuma, Iowa. His responsibilities extended throughout various departments of the organization. His job titles ranged from product engineer to advertising director.

At Sig, Mike was responsible for product design, systems engineering, quality control, and sales and product support. He has designed and brought to market dozens of Sig models and other related products, including Sig's first ARF.

Mike was the leader of Sig's engineering and production departments while the company made the transition into the computer age. With his assistance and inspiration, Sig became the first major manufacturer in the industry to produce laser-cut model airplane kits.

Aside from model construction, Mike has a strong talent for writing and photography. He has been published in MA several times, covering Nats Radio Control Scale. Other articles, photographs, and models have run in *Model Airplane News, Scale R/C Modeler, Hobby Merchandiser,* and *R/C Report*.

In 1997, Mike teamed with Shawn Elliot of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) and co-founded the KidVenture program, which introduces youth to model airplanes.

Initially the program allowed participants to experience flight using gas-powered Control Line models. It has grown throughout the years to incorporate building and flying a Free Flight model, demonstrations of Radio Control park flyers, model rockets, flight simulators, and many other aviation-oriented activities for kids.

Every year, approximately 2,000 kids attend KidVenture to experience the thrill of model aviation.