



# The AMA History Project Presents: History of the WHIRLWINDS CLUB Founded in 1960



Written in MA (02/1963); Reformatted and edited by JS (12/2016)

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*The following was published in the February 1963 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the "Club Notes" section. The writer was not identified in the magazine.*

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**Whirlwinds Model Aircraft Chapter:** The twin cities of St. Joseph and Benton Harbor, Mich., have a combined population of about 30,000, but there was no organized model airplane club activity until 1960. When several active modelers who were employees of Whirlpool approached the corporation, the Laundry Engineering Division agreed to sponsor the club. During organizational meetings several fundamental agreements were reached. Most important, the Whirlwinds would be an AMA chapter club, with all members Academy members as well.

Spreading the word and setting up a program were early problems. With the first, the local newspaper helped greatly by publishing short items and in announcing meetings inviting all modelers who were not already club members. Thus, the Whirlwinds evaded the mistake so many groups make in organizing - that of not looking beyond their immediate circle.

The program was a bit tougher. As reported in a previous issue of *MA*, the small town club - if you can call these "Twin Cities" a small town - must think of all modeling interests, not just specialties. In the summer, free flight, R/C and ukie activities are needed. In that part of the country only indoor flying is possible in the winter. Good results were obtained with paper-stick at the high school gym, and with .020 tether line racing and .020 U-Control speed racing in the Whirlpool hangar at Ross Airport.

"One activity which has proved most successful," states James Alaback, Senior Advisor, "is the Model-of-the-Month contest during winter. Each member is encouraged to bring a model to the business meeting. Club members vote on the model which they think the best (novelty, workmanship, finish, etc.). The winning plane is displayed the following month in one of the two local hobby shops, with a placard identifying the model, the builder, and giving information on the Whirlwinds Club and how to join it. The winner receives a \$5.00 merchandise certificate at the other local hobby shop (which the club purchases at dealer cost). The point system awards enables Junior, Senior, and Open club members to compete in their own class for club champion each year. One of the three becomes the grand champion. All three receive a club championship trophy for their permanent possession and the overall winner receives a perpetual club trophy donated by Whirlpool Corporation, with the winner's name and year inscribed.

"The business meetings, contests, flying sessions, Model-of-the-Month Contest, and club championship program, as well as our newsletter, are all means used to encourage

continuing active participation by the members,” continues Alaback. “The system allows one point to each member for attendance at a business meeting, one point for entering a Model-of-the-Month Contest, and five points for winning the Model-of-the-Month Contest. Entering a contest or flying session earns one point for the contestant (regardless of the number of models entered), and the winners of each event receive points as follows: first, 5 points; second, 4; third, 3; fourth, 2; fifth, 1.

“Contests are run in Junior, Senior, and Open - except for the Model-of-the-Month Contest. Members also earn points for winning at AMA sanctioned contests held by other clubs, and at the Nationals. The points here are higher than for our own club events in order to encourage the modelers to compete in other areas.

“Although the variety of interests tends to make it difficult to get activities to satisfy everyone, we have been reasonably successful, especially with the winter indoor activities and the Model-of-the-Month Contest. We have maintained a reasonably good distribution of total membership in the three age categories.

“We tried sponsoring a class in model airplane building at the Junior High School in order to attract younger people to model building. This was held on the school premises during school hours at a period of the day which is set aside for non-scholastic activities on the part of those students who have acceptable grades. This program was a failure. We found that, out of 20 students or so, only two or three were interested modelers and the existence or non-existence of the activity at school did not seem to influence their interest. The remainder of the students appeared to be primarily interested in getting out of a study hall which they otherwise would have had to attend. Therefore, we have concentrated our efforts on using the club as a vehicle for interesting young people and motivating them in the pursuit of their model building hobby.”

(In the first issue in which space permits, *MA* will print the Whirlwinds Constitution as an aid to those who may wish to form a medium to large club.)

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