



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of DAVE MATHEWSON

January 20, 1952 - October 21, 2018  
Started modeling in 1960      AMA #23



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Written by JG (05/2009), AA (02/2018), DM (06/2015), AMA staff (01/2019), Reformatted by JS (05/2011), Updated by JS (05/2013, 03/2018, 10/2018)

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*“I was eight years old the first time I flew a radio controlled model aircraft with my father, and I have been flying ever since. Model aviation spurred my interest in becoming a full scale pilot, in science and technology, taught me to work with my hands, led to a 30 year career in the medical support field and now as the Executive Director at the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA).”*  
–Dave Mathewson, *FAA Rules Clip Hobbyists’ Wings*, USA Today, June 27, 2015.

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## Career:

- 1995 – late-2000: AMA District II Associate Vice President
- Late-2000 – 2007: AMA District II Vice President
- 2008 – April 2011: 23<sup>rd</sup> AMA President
- April 2011 – April 2018: AMA Executive Director
- Flew RC Pattern/Precision Aerobatics
- Served in an officer position of an upstate New York association of clubs.

## Honors:

- 2003: AMA Exemplary Award
  - 2006: AMA Distinguished Service Award
  - 2009: AMA Fellowship Award
  - 2011: AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame Inductee
  - 2018: AMA Lifetime Achievement Award
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*The following was printed in the “Born to Fly” section of Model Aviation magazine in the May 2009 issue, written by Jim Graham. In spring of 2011, Dave Mathewson was hired as Executive Director of the AMA.*

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## Getting to know AMA President Dave Mathewson

I am fortunate to have known Dave Mathewson for several years. Since the day we met, he has treated me with respect and is quick to reply to any question. He has also been a lot of fun to hang out with at shows across the country.

Dave and his wife, Ginger, are good people. It dawned on me that many AMA members don’t know much about him, so I tracked him down at the 2009 AMA Expo in California and asked him some questions, hoping that it might help readers feel as if they know him better.

*JG: Is the position of AMA president what you thought it would be?*

**DM:** I had a perception of what I expected it to be. As far as job responsibilities, it has met those expectations. It has taken more of my time than I expected. I think things are going well, and I enjoy what I'm doing.

*JG: I envision you in Muncie doing your thing, but I wonder what kind of workload it is.*

**DM:** Like most of us, I have a full-time job. I own a dental laboratory in upstate New York. I spend a significant amount of time doing AMA business. I average about 1,000 emails a month, and I answer them all. I was out to Muncie nine times, and that is usually three days or four days at a shot.

I want to get to all AMA districts this year [2008], which means 11 locations. I made 10 out of the 11. So I'm on the road quite a bit and spend a considerable amount of time at home doing logistical work. I'm pretty fortunate that my work schedule is flexible enough to allow me to do that.

*JG: When did you get into RC in general?*

**DM:** My dad was into RC models, so I have been flying models since I was 8 years old. I don't remember a time when I wasn't flying RC models.

*JG: When it comes to RC, some pilots fly everything. I am a profile-model pilot and only focus on that. Is there a particular type of flying style that you prefer?*

**DM:** I always preferred RC Pattern/Precision Aerobatics, and I flew that for a number of years. I think I've done probably a little bit of everything. I used to do some Quickie racing, and I probably still have the granddaddy of all profile planes. I have a Sig Fazer that I built in the 90s. I still have it, still fly it, and I have a ball with it.

*JG: At what point did you have aspirations of getting involved in the AMA, and did you ever think you would be the president of the AMA?*

**DM:** I thought one day I would be a vice president. I didn't really ever consider being the AMA president. I'm probably like a lot of folks; my involvement started by volunteering to do some of the operational leadership in my local club. I held every office there.

In upstate New York, we created an association of clubs and [I] was one of the first officers there. It's just something I do. I think it's something that is instilled in you and you grow up with. Going through school, I was always the student senate guy, and it's just an extension of that. I always had aspirations of being an AMA vice president, and once I got involved at that level, I decided to go a step higher.

*JG: I was a big 3-D proponent back in the days when that was a dirty word. I met you at a trade show, and you took the time to listen to my points and discuss my issues. That was when I became a Dave Mathewson fan. It is interesting that that encounter all those years ago brings us to this point in time when you are the president of the AMA.*

*I have preached the RC religion of 3-D for years and thought that our days of being treated as second-class citizens at certain fields was over. I was lucky to have a very supportive club in Nashville, but that was not the case for my online friends. I thought that at this point 3-D was widely accepted as an important, vibrant part of our hobby. I am amazed that, once again, I'm hearing stories of 3-D pilots being run off of fields and potentially out of the hobby. What is your take on 3-D and what it means to the hobby?*

**DM:** You know, I look at the activity that is taking place in the hobby and the percentage that is 3-D, which is obviously significant. It has made significant inroads into model aviation over the last few years. I don't see 3-D any differently than when model helicopters or ducted fans were new, and there will be something someday that comes out as the next big thing.

It's not the mind-set of AMA the association, but it is the mind-set of some of our members. I was never exposed to a lot of this until I became an AMA officer. My local club is probably like a lot of other clubs: to us it doesn't matter what you fly as long as you fly. I think that is the goal we should all try to aspire to.

*JG: This year you surprised me at my own event that I host every year. I have put together a profile model 3-D-based event in Nashville, Tennessee called NashBro, for the last six or seven years. Mark T. Smith, the AMA executive vice president, has shown up at a lot of Pro Bro events and always supported us.*

*I looked up on Saturday afternoon and realized that you were on our field walking toward me! I was totally blown away; I had no idea you were coming. And if that wasn't enough, later in the day you presented me with a plaque from the AMA and blew my hat off! I wanted to thank you for all of that and taking time to visit a bunch of 3-D profile pilots having fun in a field. I was also excited that you actually got to see what a Pro Bro 3-D event was all about.*

**DM:** Well, obviously we gave you the plaque because we wanted to thank you. That was planned months and months in advance, but the way. I knew in early spring of last year that we were coming down to NashBro. You know, it's an event. I didn't hear any "3-D" or "profile"; it was just a fly-in, and it had a camaraderie that went along with it.

I think that is the way we should all participate in this hobby, whether you're flying helicopters, sailplanes, or IMAC [International Miniature Aerobatic Club]. We are all in this hobby because we love model aviation, and that's the way we should treat each other.

*JG: Many of us have families, jobs, and things we need to do. The Pro Bros and the RC hobby in general have allowed me to make lifelong friends. The amazing thing is that this was done through a Web forum. We meet up with one another across the country and fly together, and there is no way to put a value on that.*

**DM:** There's not. And as someone who has been in model aviation all my life, 90% of my friends are probably model aviation enthusiasts. I don't know anything different and it's been such a big part of my life and an important part of my life. You ask, "What's the value of clubs

and what's the value of AMA?" You hear all the time: it's bringing modelers together. It's as much about the friendship as it is about the flying.

**JG:** *My goal, when I go to a show or cover an event for RCGroups.com, is to have a good time and make sure everyone around me is having a good time, and I hope that's what we all do.*

**DM:** Absolutely! You know I love this stuff. It doesn't matter what you're flying. I love going to events, whether they are for Warbirds or whatever. When I get to those events, I love watching things fly and talking about them. The hobby is all-encompassing.

**JG:** *The goal of this month's column is to let the membership get to know you better. Is there anything you would want to say if an AMA member were standing in front of you?*

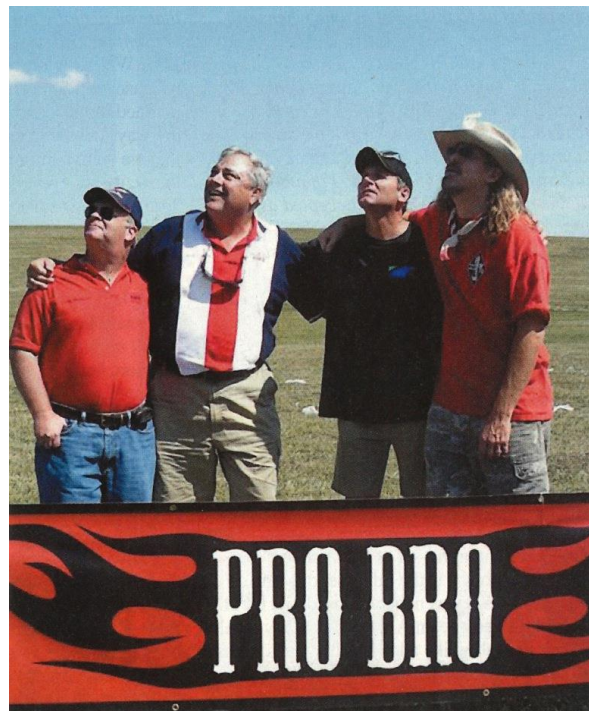
**DM:** The Executive Council and those of us who are the leadership of the AMA are modelers just like everybody else. We fly our model airplanes or our helicopters. Some of us are 3-D pilots or turbine fliers, but we're active fliers like all of our members.

We have worked hard this year to become an association that is more progressive and does more to advocate for our members, and I think that will benefit all of us in the long run.

**JG:** *When I came up, the AMA was a bad word in my group. I always felt on the fringe or outside of RC. I never felt a part of the AMA as a 3-D pilot. It's great to now have been around long enough to feel that the AMA defends and supports us. I think it's great that you and the other officers are so accessible. The fact that I have an AMA shirt on would have been unthinkable a few years ago!*

**DM:** Well, that's exactly right. Again, model aviation is more than the airplane that you fly. I spoke with some of the folks down at NashBro, and each niche of the hobby thinks of themselves as rebels or radicals. The truth is, and I'm a little older than you, when I was your age, we were doing the same things you guys were doing. There were probably members back then who thought I was a rebel as well.

The fact is, we aren't rebels; we just all enjoy model aviation. I'll leave you with this comment that my friend, Dean Pappas, used to start his columns with: "If it flies, I'm interested in it." That epitomizes how I feel about model aviation.



**L-R: Dave Mathewson, Mark T. Smith, Tony Dupaquier (Pro Bro emcee), and Jim T. Graham do the Thousand Mile Stare at NashBro. (Source: Model Aviation magazine, May 2009)**



*Jim T. Graham, aka 3-D evangelist Billy Hell, accepts an award of appreciation from Dave Mathewson and the AMA. And there's that Thousand Mile Stare! (Source: Model Aviation magazine, May 2009)*



*Dave Mathewson addresses Pro Bros at the NashBro 3-D profile flying event in Nashville, TN. The AMA wants to support any interest that promotes model aviation. (Source: Model Aviation magazine, May 2009)*

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*The following was printed in the "AMA News" section of Model Aviation magazine in the February 2018 issue, written by VP Andy Argenio in his District I column.*

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Dave Mathewson's AMA career celebrates many accomplishments under his tenures as District II Vice President, 23<sup>rd</sup> AMA President, and AMA's Executive Director (ED). In each of these roles he captured a spirit of exceptionalism that dramatically improved the operations of the academy and the value proposition for AMA clubs and members.

I have had the honor and privilege of working with Dave for the past 14 years and consider Dave to have been among the very best of AMA's Presidents and Executive Directors. The ED Review Committee annually surveys the council and members of staff to evaluate the ED's job performance for contract renewal. I chair the committee and have reviewed EDs since 2005. Dave's reviews have all been commendable. He addresses challenges and opportunities with best practices that often exceed objectives.

What follows are some highlights under Dave's leadership. He has sustained now a 6-year trend of membership growth through effective incentive programs after nine years of decline and built a long-term strategy to improve AMA's public image. Dave is most proud of eliminating staff morale issues and establishing a collaborative work environment where interdepartmental team efforts are now common. He readily utilized new technologies for management and membership services, improving information/media resourcing and dissemination. Non-dues revenue for educational outreach during 2012-2016 increased by \$172,000 and member donations by \$203,000. AMA's Educational Department developed the popular UAS4STEM competitions for pre-college and college students. In 2016, Dave restructured Government Relations to improve advocacy efforts and position AMA to meet the ever-increasing need to focus on regulatory threats on federal, state, and local levels of government. AMA's Publication Department evolved to implement digital outreach that included the popular "AMA Air" videos. The Museum launched the "virtual" museum project to take museum experiences to people who couldn't visit Muncie. The Competitions Department created the Event Director position to address non-competitive event sanctions. New affinity programs like National Car Rental added value for members. Flying Site Assistance engaged more with government agencies to acquire flying sites for AMA clubs. The "Drone Zone in Cities" campaign encouraged municipalities to help identify locations where drone pilots could safely fly instead of banning drones. An IT professional was hired to implement and manage the new association management system to provide all sorts of anticipated value for AMA members and clubs.

Little known, but worth mentioning, is that before becoming AMA's ED, Dave was instrumental in introducing "term limits" for elected AMA officers to revitalize the council with new ideas and directions. With his support and efforts we were able to put in place "vicarious primary liability insurance" for Contest & Event Directors, Large Model Aircraft Inspectors, and Event Safety Officers for accidents involving the acts of members they assisted. He was the first to embrace what was the new technology of FPV and automated flying in 2008 and drafted AMA's initial operational rules.

It will not be the same for many of us on council without Dave providing leadership and direction, few people have ever cared as much about the association and its members as Dave does. We will miss Dave and his wonderful wife's presence at AMA council meetings and events and will forever remember all the fun times we have shared together. May God bless you both for your devotion and friendship these many years.

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*The following obituary, by AMA staff, was printed in the "In the Air" section of Model Aviation magazine in the January 2019 issue.*

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Dave Mathewson

KNOWN TO AMA MEMBERS across the country as a former AMA District II associate vice president (AVP), vice president (VP), AMA president, and the organization's executive director (ED), many also counted Dave Mathewson as a friend.

On October 21, 2018, the aeromodeling hobby suffered a stinging loss when Dave passed away at age 66. The RC Aerobatics (Pattern) pilot has been described by many as the hobby's biggest cheerleader and a passionate leader.

AMA employees would likely say that as the ED, Dave was hard working, dedicated, and always had the members' and employees' best interests at heart. Although he often worked well past the time his employees went home each day, he never hesitated to stop and thank them for their hard work or listen to their concerns.

He was a friend to all.

"Dave was a giant of a man, loved by most everyone, and his passing leaves a tremendous void in our hearts," wrote Gary Fitch, former AMA executive vice president. "Those of us who knew Dave Mathewson well are much better people because of him."

Those who knew Dave also knew that he was a private man. He kept his health issues confidential and wanted his services after he passed away to be private. But one thing that he did not keep to himself was his passion for model aviation.

"Dave's love of the hobby was infectious," wrote AMA President Rich Hanson. When he took office as AMA's ED in April 2011, following the resignation of Jim Cherry, Dave likely had no idea that the hobby was about to enter the fight of its life. But he went to battle and ensured that AMA did everything it could to secure the hobby's future. He also turned around a membership decline.

"Dave was one of the most positive people I have known," Gary shared. "His enthusiasm was infectious with our AMA staff as they reorganized and worked together. Dave's management style was immediately effective in moving our organization forward. In his first year as ED, AMA turned around a multiyear decline in membership to one that grew each year."

Gary fondly recalled the first time that he met Dave in 2000:

“We first met in early August at a fun-fly - my first as AVP and likely his first as VP. I was assembling a plane when I looked down the pit line and saw this guy, small in stature, but larger than life itself, walking the line.

“[In a] new AMA white shirt and blue hat, he had that swagger that said I’m confident in what I’m doing for AMA. It took him 30 minutes to travel 100 feet because everyone wanted to meet him. I finally got my chance and it was the beginning of the closest of friendships,” Gary stated.

While living in New York, Dave served as a District II AVP from 1995 to late 2000, then served as the district’s VP until 2007. In 2003, he decided to run for AMA president, but lost. His second bid for that position was successful, and he served as president from 2008 to April 2011.

According to Gary, when Dave decided to step down as president and move to Muncie, Indiana, to serve as the ED, he and his wife, Ginger, had to make so sacrifices. “Dave sold his [dental lab] business in Syracuse, New York,” Gary wrote.

“Ginger gave up a lucrative medical position, and they sold their home so that he could become our executive director.”

Rich added that Dave “very effectively and efficiently managed AMA’s daily operations until his retirement.”

After retiring as AMA ED, Dave wanted to spend more time pursuing his passion: flying model aircraft. He planned a trip with Gary to Joe Nall Week at the Triple Tree Aerodrome in Woodruff, South Carolina, but the event was canceled because of heavy rain. Later, in July 2018, Ginger drove Dave to a fun-fly at Gary’s club. Gary remembers that event fondly.

“He was getting weaker by the week, but he was determined to show up, and our members loved talking with him. Dave’s best friend and Pattern flier, Mike Gosson, made the three-hour trip to be with and fly with Dave. I believe this was the last event Dave was able to physically attend and we loved having him there,” Gary added.

Gary was able to see Dave again in the last few days of his life. “While he could barely talk, he raised his hand and gave us a fist bump. He knew what he meant to us.”

Dave was laid to rest in St. Francis Xavier Cemetery, in Marcellus, New York. In his obituary, friends and family were asked that instead of sending flowers, to send donations to the AMA, 5161 E. Memorial Dr., Muncie IN 47302. If you wish to make an online donation in Dave’s memory, visit [www.modelaircraft.org/donate](http://www.modelaircraft.org/donate).





*Dave Mathewson*  
(Source: *Model Aviation magazine*,  
*April 2010*)

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