



# The AMA History Project Presents: History of the MILLIS MODEL AIRCRAFT CLUB



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## **Flying Field Neighbors**

By: Tom Kempf

**It's one thing to obtain a good flying site. It's quite another to keep using it year-after-year in harmony with nearby neighbors. This is a story of how an AMA chartered club found hosting of an annual Open House to be beneficial.**

WE'VE ALL heard horror stories about model clubs losing their flying sites. The most common reason for field loss is given as noise, even though that reason may be hidden in a tangle of other complaints.

Our club (Millis Model Aircraft Club, Millis MA) believes there's more to these complaints than noise alone, and we've found a way to virtually eliminate hard feelings on the part of our flying-field neighbors. Our engines are as noisy as many that are muffled. Our flying field is located in the center of town, and the engines can be heard for quite a distance. In fact, I was sitting in church one Sunday morning listening to two droning sounds: one from the pulpit and one from our flying field about four blocks away.

Yet we've never had a complaint. Not once have the police visited to tell us to hold it down. Not once has a nearby resident called to complain about the noise.

Some clubs might contend that we're just plain lucky, but we make our own luck by holding a special event each spring. The last two years we've held a personal open house for our flying-field neighbors. The key word is personal.

The concept came to us when we put ourselves in our neighbors' place. "What is that noise disturbing this quiet Saturday afternoon?" we could imagine them asking. Then they might think, "They've got a lot of nerve doing whatever it is they're doing so close to my house. Nobody asked me if it was alright."

Right or wrong, we reasoned, this is the way people think. They want to be let in on what's happening. They don't like to be left out, and the unknown is irritating.

Our solution is to give them personal attention by holding an open house each June, just for them. We make up an invitation sheet which gives the date of the event, explains that there will be an aircraft display and flight demonstrations, and assures them that the

refreshments will be free. A map showing the location of the field entrance is printed on the back of the invitation.

We also order AMA brochures and information sheets from the AMA Public Relations Department. When they arrive, we make up individual packets and attach them to the invitations. Then comes the first personal part of the event.

Our club officers go from door-to-door delivering the invitations to 50 of our closest flying-field neighbors. We explain a little bit about the event, and tell them it's alright to bring the entire family, plus any interested friends. When we discuss it later, we discover we all have experienced the same thing—a positive reaction from everyone. People react favorably, because they're used to being solicited by mail or phone. Our personal approach makes a solid impression and establishes our club as a responsible, mature organization.

The morning of the event is full of feverish preparation. A large area at one end of the parking lot is roped off for the static display. We even add a complete flight box and a fuselage that shows a typical radio installation. This comes in handy when people ask, "How do you control one of those things?"

The personal touch continues as visitors arrive. One member greets each car as it drives in and hands the driver an information sheet plus a copy of our field regulations. He tells the driver where to park, and directs him to the soft-drink supply.

As the crowd grows, every member makes an effort to mingle as much as possible. Each of us wears a name tag so that our guests can identify club members easily. One of us is busy all the time at the display area, answering questions and demonstrating equipment. We could blow the whole thing by forming little groups of club members and discussing modeling subjects among ourselves. We keep it personal by making our guests feel welcome.

Our most experienced fliers do the flight demonstrations. This is not the day for a crash! Most of the visitors have never seen an RC model fly, and are always amazed at the control we have over our aircraft. Typical comments are, "They're bigger than I thought," "I didn't realize they were so complicated," and the kicker, "They're not as loud as I expected."

One person we make sure to invite is the property owner. He's now confident that we're not going to wreck his land or become a community nuisance. We won't have to worry about losing his permission to use the property.

It's always a pleasant afternoon for everyone, and results in genuine respect for our activities. Our flying-field neighbors know exactly what "that noise" is when they hear it. They also know many of our members personally, and are assured that we're not a bunch of radicals.

Most importantly, if someday a person who didn't attend the event should complain about our club to someone who was there, we can count on support. The person who

knows us will probably say, “You ought to go over and watch them fly. It’s interesting, and they’re a nice group of people.”

That keeps anti-noise petitions from circulating, and goes a long way toward fending off complaints. We’ll have our third open house this year, probably with even more people attending. We’d spring for fifty cases of Coke for the kind of results we get.

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**AMA History Project**  
National Model Aviation Museum  
5151 E. Memorial Dr.  
Muncie IN 47302  
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511  
[historyproject@modelaircraft.org](mailto:historyproject@modelaircraft.org)

