



The AMA History Project Presents: History of the KITSAP AIRCRAFT RADIO CONTROL SOCIETY (KITSAP ARCS) Since 1968 AMA Charter #839



Written by BB (11/2005); Reformatted by JS (08/2010)

The following was published in the November 2005 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

The Kitsap ARCS Club Story **By Bill Bambrick**

The Club I belong to – the Kitsap Aircraft Radio Control Society or Kitsap ARCS- started 37 years ago when a few Radio Control-minded enthusiasts who were tired of hauling their models to distant airfields decided to start their own organization. The decision began a long, colorful history that is still unfolding today.

Kitsap County is situated on the peninsula forming the western shore for the beautiful Puget Sound, a half-hour ferry ride from Seattle, Washington. It is far enough from the big city to be pastoral, with magnificent views of the snowcapped Olympic and Cascade mountain ranges and enough water to satisfy the greediest sailor.

Formed in 1968, the Kitsap ARCS initially made use of the county fairgrounds for a flying field. However, the frequent competition with regular fair activities forced us to find a new home at the Bremerton National Airport, southeast of Port Orchard. The airport had an unused runway, which was serving as a drag strip for a local automobile club. It seemed ideal for Radio Control flying.

But such a fliers' paradise was too good to be true. In 1997, the airport management, which was concerned that our model-airplane flying constituted a hazard to their full-scale civil aircraft traffic, asked us to move.

The Kitsap ARCS had to look for another home. Marlin Little, a newcomer to the club, volunteered to take on the task.

The county administration helped us find an abandoned baseball field near the village of Olalla, which is a few miles to the south. However, some of the neighbors began complaining about our noise level. It really wasn't that bad; we were keeping it below 91 decibels.

But the protesters prevailed. So, after spending \$5,000 to improve the old ball field, we were forced to move again. In an act of gentlemanly sportsmanship, the Tacoma Narrows RC Club offered to share its field with us until we could find our own.

Marlin's efforts with the county eventually bore fruit. Commissioners Jan Angel and Chris Endresen helped us find a little-used gravel pit near Port Orchard. The McCormick Woods Land Management Corporation, owner of the property, had been negotiating with the county parks department to have the county buy part of the gravel pit as a park.

Marlin convinced both parties that it would make sense to turn part of the new parkland over to a flying club that needed a new home. That would promise careful stewardship of the county's property.

A deal was struck. The McCormick Woods developer offered to level the gravel pit for us and clear enough of the trees to make a fine, if somewhat rustic, flying field.

In a rapid sequence of well-attended work parties, our gang raked the rocks, put in drainage ditches, finished leveling the 75 x 300-foot landing strip, and covered it with a heavy plasticized fabric surface. By 2001, we were making takeoffs and landings.

The temporary arrangement was formalized in the spring of 2003, when the county officially signed a deal with the McCormick Woods management. Joseph Coppo, Open Space Coordinator for the County Parks Department, presented the final agreement, which included provisions for us to remove whatever scrub bushes and fir trees were necessary to enhance safe flying.

All of this was done thanks to the unstinting hard work of Marlin Little, despite his being constrained to move about in a motorized wheelchair.

In 2003, the club purchased and erected a 20 x 100-foot canopy to protect the newly constructed flight benches in the pit area during inclement weather. We also purchased two bleacher units to accommodate visitors, which also helps keep them away from the pit areas.

The bleachers have been used for our annual air shows and for the training programs we put on each summer for young people who want to learn to fly. Our last air show drew nearly 800 spectators.

Future plans include replacing the fabric runway surface with hard asphalt, putting in power lines and water, and removing more trees to expand the safe flying area and make it easier to find downed models, which sometimes go undetected in the dense bush for months.

In recognition of our field negotiator's untiring work, we have decided to name our site "Little Field."

Our club includes many members who enjoy float flying. We have established a regular float-flying location at Crocker Lake, near the Hood Canal, approximately 30 miles north of us.

We take pride in working with the local community. Our club wins a prize every year for its colorful float in the Port Orchard Fathoms O' Fun parade, and we man a popular booth at the Kitsap County annual fair.

In addition, we host a booth at the three-day Kitsap Mall show. Our club's popularity has been a major factor in the rapid growth of Radio Control flying in the area, which has expanded our current membership to more than 125.

Beginning last winter, we initiated an educational program at the Hobby Outlet – our newest local hobby shop – to teach local youth the fine art of building model aircraft. Gary Rose, Jr. managed the event. We will continue our flight school for 10- to 17-year-olds, with ground school and buddy-box instruction at the field using the AMA school program.

Our club is looking ahead to a major event sometime in 2006. Christine Ogle, who is special events coordinator at the large Kitsap Mall in Silverdale, has announced that she would like to host a multi-hobby mall show. It will feature displays of craftsmanship from all four of the most popular segments of the modeling community: airplanes, boats, cars, and trains.

The Kitsap ARCS club has offered to coordinate this huge event with the other clubs and hobby shops. It is hoped that this might pave the way for an annual exhibition in our county, which would be a popular addition.

Meanwhile, our group plans to continue to expand our annual air shows, kids' training programs, and other community activities.

Anyone who is interested in contacting us may do so by checking out our Web site at www.kitsaparcs.org. It features many interesting articles and pictures of past events, and it has a calendar of upcoming activities.

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