



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of VINCENT MICCHIA



Written by JD (6/2009); Edited/Reformatted (08/2009)

John deBelle wrote the following biography of Vincent Micchia in 2009.

Balsawood, Glue, and Destiny

I have always picked out my next model airplane project myself, but recently destiny did it for me. At 55, I have become quite attached to building and flying airplane models, according to my friends. However, I prefer to use the word eccentric. It seems to give more flavor to my hobby. At 13 years old, pecan pie, ice cream, balsawood, and glow fuel all had the same appeal to me. Not necessarily in that order, those things seemed to bring a smile to my face and a spark to my heart. They still do!

I am now retired from the United States Air Force. I enjoyed my job in aeronautical science at Travis Air Force Base in California with the military airlift command. Of course, you do not want to hear about that, you would rather go back to the model airplane stuff. So would I, and so we shall. It was January 16, 2009. I was in my workshop digging through my model airplane plans (all 500 of them,) deciding on my next project. I came across a plan of a 1960s kit put out by Midwest Model Products of Hobart, Indiana, and it seemed to almost speak out to me, so it ended up on my building table.

The building started out slow and progressed over the next 11 days between the pecan pie, ice cream, and coffee breaks. On Wednesday, January 28, I decided to call my friend Rich LaGrange, the Librarian at the AMA, to see if I could learn anything about the designer of this neat vintage Radio Control model from Midwest Products Company. The designer was Vincent Micchia, whose name is on several of the model plans in my collection. I am fond of model airplane history and have that “who were they” curiosity.

Here is the part where you can start scratching your head. Mr. Micchia had just passed away on January 16, 2009, the day I chose to start building the little tri-squire. It gets better!

The next day I called Rancho Cucamonga, California, not knowing who might answer the telephone and what I should say if they did. Her name was Sherry and she was Mr. Micchia’s daughter, a very warm-hearted young lady of 55 years. The first ten minutes of our telephone conversation was strange indeed, with me finding out that her father had passed on to the flying field in the sky on the same day destiny mysteriously chose my next modeling project.

Stranger still was Sherry telling me that she had been walking around for days in her father's home, shuffling through the endless boxes of old time model parts and airplanes, thinking of what to do with everything. At one point, she told me she had spoken out openly to her father, hoping in some way he would contact her from his new home to let her know what to do about this mountain of stuff. Maybe a box full of engines or escapements would turn over, or the ceiling fan would turn a few times by itself, letting her know Vincent's spirit was still among his things. Possibly a copy of *John Pond Old Time Plan Service* catalog with a note inside might slide off into the floor next to her father's cluttered workbench.

We both pondered many of things as she told me of her father's wonderful ways and vast modeling projects hanging from the ceiling. Vintage names known to many of us modelers, such as Aerotrol, Babcock, Citizenship, Cox, Controlaire and so many more, we discussed and reminisced over as Sherry continued. Escapements of all kinds and engines of every make you could imagine from those old times filled boxes and decorated the colorful airplanes hanging aloft. I have read many articles of modelers and their history, but this was the first time I was blessed with hearing such a heart-warming story straight from a passing modeler's family. Speaking of family, I learned at this point that Vincent, his daughters, and wife were actually involved in those old days of the original forming of Midwest Models Company.

Vincent had been given his own drawing room and drafting table at Midwest by owner Frank Garcher back then because at that time Vincent was Frank's key designer of kit models and plans. Many of Vincent's designs were die-cut, packed up and shipped to modelers who patiently awaited the arrival of a box of soft wood airplane parts that would eventually become part of their childhood memories, memories that would take them into the future and carry them back again when they got there.

Sherry and her sister, Debbie, actually walked across a dried, grassy field behind Midwest Products Company after school back in those days to operate some of the balsawood die-cutter machines producing Frank Garcher's kits. Imagine two high school girls working after school in the die-cutting shop of one of the most famous model airplane companies on the planet. How many of you gentlemen can say you've done that?

Their mother also worked at Midwest, as the story goes, in the packing and shipping part of the company. She lovingly and carefully arranged all the wood goodies and gizmos in the boxes that would be sent out to hobby shops all over, boxes with labels bearing the Midwest Products name and a picture of the model of your choice that would forever etch itself in a modeler's heart.

I felt privileged to learn about this interesting and talented modeler, how his family and he worked together, and the joys they must have experience in those early days working at Midwest Products. I feel, through learning the story of his modeling career and getting to know part of his private life and the kind of gentleman he was, that I would have enjoyed going out to the flying field and flying with him. Vincent Micchia is now gone

and I missed that chance in this life. I feel through his plans that his spirit will live on and maybe someday in the distant future destiny may give me another chance to fly with him.

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