



The AMA History Project Presents: History of the SOUTHERN TIER AERO RADIO SOCIETY (STARS) Since 1935



Written by AMA Staff (04/2006); Transcribed by JS (07/2008), Reformatted by JS (07/2010, 01/2013)

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New York Club Receives Prestigious AMA Award

August 28, 2005, AMA recognized the Southern Tier Aero Radio Society (STARS) of Cuba, New York, for having a momentous impact on the world of Radio Control aircraft. AMA members/pilots from Ithaca, Jamestown, Corning, Rochester, Buffalo, Honeoye, Franklinville, Wayland, Wellsville, and Olean – all cities in New York State – came to share in this historic event.

In addition, there were AMA members from three cities in Pennsylvania – Eldred, Bradford, and Warren – and MAAC members from the Fort Erie and Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, area.

AMA Executive Director Don Koranda and District II Vice President Dave Mathewson presented the STARS with the highest honor bestowed by AMA: the National Aeromodeling Historic Landmark Award. This is only the second time in AMA history that this honor has been presented.

The award consists of two heavy bronze plaques, one of which is the newly designed AMA header plaque. It has become the standard for this and all future Historic Landmark Awards. It reads, “National Aeromodeling Historic Landmark, Recognized, and Dedicated by the Academy of Model Aeronautics.”

The other plaque is unique to each recipient. It reads:

“Clapp Field” – The Southern Tier Aero Radio Society, operating from Clapp Field in Olean, NY, is acknowledged as being a leader in the development of Giant Scale Radio Controlled Aircraft beginning in 1975. The STARS relocated from Clapp Field to Cuba, NY when the Society purchased this site in the late 1980s. Established in 1935, STARS is one of the oldest AMA clubs in the United States.”

Today, in the era of 33%-, 40%-, and even 50%-scale ARFs, it is difficult to imagine what STARS members Jim Messer, Bob Dunn, Bill Messer, Bob Brown (longtime AMA District III Vice President), Charlie Nellis, Lou Etscher, and deceased members Ken Koeppel, George Privater, and George Clapp accomplished.

The story behind this award involved several years and many trials in their development of a flyable ¼-scale Bristol Scout during the 1970s. This was a significant task because there were no

kits, engines, wheels, cowls, or propellers for Giant Scale aircraft. A total of six Bristol Scouts made up the first squadron of 1/4-scale models shown anywhere.

The STARS members traveled to numerous flying events in the US and Canada, showing off their “huge” aircraft and flying in formation at the Rhinebeck Jamboree in 1977 and 1978, where they were voted “best of show.”

Their Scouts were featured on the cover of *Radio Control Speed & Sport* magazine and a construction article (with plans) was published in *Model Airplane News*. All the RC magazines featured the STARS and their Scouts in one way or another and the idea of building *big* rapidly became a worldwide craze.

The most interesting aspect is the impact the development of Giant Scale aircraft had on the STARS. In 1977, the club began hosting its yearly Scale rally at the Olean Municipal Airport in July. The goal was to earn enough money and secure the group’s further by purchasing a flying field.

The STARS drew large crowds and modeling icons to its event. It was common to see such people as Hal deBolt, Nick Zirolì, Don Godfrey, Wendell Hostetler, and Frank Noll at the fly-in, where they attended, flew, and promoted their products.

Within 10 years, the club had accumulated enough money to purchase property from the STARS member Clifford “Kip” Karn and develop a permanent flying field, which is now located just off the West Lake Road in Cuba, New York.

Jim Messer started and developed a business in which he designed and manufactured Giant Scale kits. He also became the first Quadra engine dealer in the US, selling more than 400 Q-35 power plants in the first year alone.

The STARS extends its sincere appreciation to Don Koranda and Dave Mathewson for their time and effort in making this award possible. We would also like to thank our friends and family members who came to be with us and share in the presentation. We are indebted to those nine individuals who made the Giant Scale Dream come true.

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