



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JOHN A. SPALDING

Born in 1926 Modeler since 1936



Written by AMA Staff (01/2010); Reformatted by JS (01/2010)

AMA Staff wrote the following for the January 2010 issue of Model Aviation magazine. Spalding was a 2009 Model Aviation Hall of Fame inductee.

John A. Spalding

In 1936, John Spalding was 10, his brother was seven, and times were exciting. Warplanes were in the news and the brothers poured over every item. John became hooked on aviation. During World War II, he built 1/32-scale wooden models of military aircraft that were used to train people to recognize friendly and enemy airplanes.

After the war, John and his modeling friends founded the Minneapolis Piston Pals, the first of several model airplane clubs that John organized. The teenagers flew their Control Line models at various fields and frozen lakes.

John's move to Boston in 1948 did not dampen his enthusiasm for modeling. With the help and support of other modelers, he formed a new club, the Piston Pals of Watertown.

John tried his hand at owning and operating a hobby shop specializing in model airplane kits and supplies, but gave it up after a year. He was drafted in 1950 and spent the next four years in the military, where he occasionally had the opportunity to fly Control Line.

In 1958, John built his first Radio Control model, *Gramps*, which was designed by Bill Winter in consultation with Hal deBolt. It flew successfully, but control was primitive by today's standards. Living near Washington D.C., John joined the District of Columbia Radio Control Club (DCRC).

In 1965, John became an AMA Contest Director (CD) and Leader Member. DCRC held annual symposiums for many years and John was active in these, chairing one in 1966. This led to running Pattern contests, symposiums, and eventually he assumed the role of club president.

John formed an action committee to rewrite the constitution and bylaws to install a board of directors to do the club's business so the membership meetings could be educational and entertaining affairs. The club grew to more than 300 members.

His many activities with DCRC led to meetings with John Worth and other AMA leaders. He was encouraged to run for District IV Vice President in 1973, and in that position, he supported moving AMA Headquarters to a centrally located site with a flying field. John used his business background to suggest new ways of utilizing insurance that changed the AMA insurance concept. Using the EAA model as an example, John was a forceful proponent of the in-house magazine concept, which eventually resulted in publishing *Model Aviation* in 1976. John was

rewarded with the Meritorious Service Award. He also received the Al Montzka Outstanding Service Award from DCRC.

In 1972, John was one of the organizers of the Prince Georges County RC Club (PGRC) that is one of the major Washington D.C.-area clubs to this day.

John taught a course in the art of building full-scale aircraft with wood at the Harford Community College. For this course, he received an award for the most informational program from Chapter IV of the EAA, located at College Park, Maryland.

Retired in 1996, John moved to the Eastern Shore of Maryland. There, with a few other retired modelers, he formed the Shorebirds RC Club and chartered it with the AMA.

John has made his retirement home in Ocean Pines, a modeler's dream. He has built a complete workshop addition to his house. It has an air vacuum system and paint room. One room is a library of model magazines and literature dating back to the 1940s with a drafting table for model design. John's workshop and loft contain approximately 90 complete models that he has built, including a full-scale ultralight.

He continued to spread the joys of modeling by teaching a course at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore on model building and aerodynamics.

"If ever there was a modeler who had devoted a major part of his life to the promotion of the model airplane hobby, it is John A. Spalding," wrote his induction sponsor, Bill Cavanaugh.

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