



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of MATTHEW A. SULLIVAN

c. 1911 - August 10, 1979

AMA #L6



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Career:

- Founded Sullivan Pylon Products in 1941; it was one of the earliest hobby accessory manufacturing companies
- Founded a plastic manufacturing firm called Sullifoam in 1955
- Supported the AMA in many ways included with tremendous financial support
- Originated the AMA scholarship fund
- Was a certified contest director; help run the Nationals when it was held in the Philadelphia area
- One of the key leaders of the 8-Ball Club in the 1950s and early 1960s

Honors:

- 1964: AMA Fellow
- 1979: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- Received the Distinguished Service Award and the Meritorious Award of Honor from the Hobby Industry Association of America

The following article ran in the November 1979 issue of Model Aviation magazine following the death of Matty Sullivan.

Gone, But Still With Us Matty Sullivan We Bid Farewell to a Friend

By John E. Clemens,
a past president of the AMA

Matthew A. Sullivan, one of the most honored and quietly influential persons in the history of model aeronautics, died August 10 at the age of 68. As a testimonial to his friendliness, he put those around him at ease by asking that he always be addressed as “Matty.” Mr. Sullivan, in 1941, founded one of the earliest hobby accessory manufacturing companies, Sullivan Pylon Products. Most of his products were of his own invention. In 1955, he also founded a highly successful plastic manufacturing firm, known as Sullifoam. He was active in both businesses until his death.

Matty’s credits were legion, having received the highest honors from both the business and pleasure worlds of model aviation. He served on the board of directors of the Hobby Industry Association of America (HIAA). He was recognized by that organization with the Distinguished Service Award and the Meritorious Award of Honor – the HIAA’s highest honors.

Matty Sullivan has been honored by our Academy of Model Aeronautics with the highest of its awards. These are life membership (number L6), an AMA Fellowship and, just recently, election to the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. Thankfully, word of his selection for the Hall of Fame came through in time to put a congratulatory telegram in Matty’s hands shortly before he passed away.

Matty was a prime mover back in the days when AMA so badly needed a prime mover. He was always first to dig in his pockets for funds to help solve those early problems. Then he would quickly follow up by urging his hobby business friends to do likewise. Matty also looked with us to the future, being the originator of the AMA scholarship fund. I like to believe that without Sullivan, his clever and unique products and his financial support and encouragement, our hobby/sport/business would somehow not quite be what it is today.

Matty Sullivan, our fellow AMA member, was a giant in stature, a giant of character, and a giant of generosity with a happy heart to match. He was a ruddy-faced, down-to-earth, warm, and cheerful friend to all who sought him as a friend. Matty would not want us to grieve his leaving, but would rather our memory of him serve as a smiling inspiration. Please join me in this sacred moment of saying good-bye to a beloved friend.

The following article ran immediately after the previous one in the November 1979 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

Memories of Matty

By John Worth

When AMA was broke (1963 to 1965) and I was new on the scene, having been hired by AMA to turn things around, industry support for new AMA programs was vital to success. Matty Sullivan was the first model industry leader to step forward and be a sponsor. When others held back and waited to see whether AMA could come back, Matty was urging them to get on the bandwagon.

He always backed up his support with cash, always first with the most. He offended some by embarrassing them, suggesting that if they drove Cadillacs they could afford a donation to AMA. And he publicly rebuked those who gave only lip service support, using his own caustic version of "Put your money where your mouth is."

But Matty's support was with more than money. He was a certified contest director and helped run the National Championships when it was in the Philadelphia area. He was constantly involved in his company's workshop developing new products; not just to make money, but to do things better and safer. He gave away a lot of his products, particularly as gifts or souvenirs to U.S. teams and to foreign guests attending AMA events.

At Lakehurst, New Jersey, for the 1974 Aerolympics he donated the use of his company's trailer truck and driver to meet teams and haul their model boxes. He also underwrote, incognito, various parties and hosting affairs at World Championships operated by AMA. And during the years of Navy-sponsored Nationals, he often quietly footed the bill for hosting key Navy officers, the Blue Angels Air Show team, press parties, etc.

Matty was often the silent partner in AMA projects, seeking no publicity or personal gain. During the 1960s when AMA could not even afford a banquet ticket to the annual Hobby Industry Association dinner, Matty always saw to it that AMA reps were prominently seated at VIP tables to help influence support for Academy programs.

When the 8-Ball Club was in its heyday – during the 1950s and early 1960s – Matty was one of the key leaders in its activities. He never forgot that the original purpose of the 8-Ball Club was

to promote support for AMA. There is much more to tell about Matty Sullivan, but the list is endless with leadership activities, such as his initiation of the AMA's scholarship program.

Suffice it to say that Matty has received every model aviation award AMA and the model industry had to bestow. If there were more, he would have received them. But he always gave more than he received – that was his trademark.

The last time I saw Matty was a rare and special treat. It was at the end of the 1979 Toledo Radio Control Conference. The big event was over and practically everyone was heading home. But Matty and his wife, Marg, were staying over an extra night and so was I. We had supper and a long evening of conversation together, talking mostly of Academy plans and goals and reviewing the past.

Matty was full of praise that night for Laird “Doc” Jackson and the medical help he got from modeler friends when non-modeler doctors could not solve his problems. It was a grand evening – a privilege I will never forget. I had the feeling that Matty came to Toledo this time, despite having been seriously ill for a year, because he wanted to be with modeling friends one more time. I was lucky to have a few hours with him and his wife alone – something almost impossible to do since he was always surrounded by people.

He's gone now, but only from the daily scene. The evidence of his having been with us is everywhere. It is in every flight of a Control Liner – his lines were used worldwide. So, too, in RC where Sullivan starters predominate. That is really fitting: Matty Sullivan was the greatest starter himself – a true leader. A giant among all industry friends of model aviation. Whatever AMA is today, a good part can be credited to Matty Sullivan. He made things happen.

The following article on Matty Sullivan immediately followed the previous ones. This one was included in the “President's Report” by Earl F. Witt in the November 1979 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

In Tribute to a Great Man

By Earl F. Witt

Matty Sullivan passed away on Friday, August 10, 1979. We have lost one of model aviation's greatest men! He was a vibrant man – one who had devoted much of his life to model aviation and its growth – one who leaves a void in our lives and will not soon be forgotten!

He was an alert, hardheaded businessman who expressed his interests and intentions through stories. For every story there was a moral and for every moral a story. One of Matty's oft-told stories was about a boy to whom he gave a free set of Control Lines so the boy could participate in a contest, but the boy's father wanted to pay Matty for them. Matty went into a long dissertation about the financial involvements it would cause between local dealers, middlemen, taxes, accounting and how, in the end, it would cost Matty too much to sell the item. In fact, he told the father, it would do him a favor if he would take the lines as a gift!

Innovation was one of Matty's greatest assets. I remember when he had one of the best fuel pumps around but they had been discontinued, I asked him if he could dig one up for me. He said that, actually, it was a windshield washer pump made for German cars and he to discontinue them because the Germans got smart and started charging him too much.

An Irishman with little patience for procrastinators in the industry or in modeling associations, he spearheaded many actions to promote and continue model aviation. One of the most notable was the backing of the AMA scholarship program, a program that came into being only because of his effective push. During the last three months of his life, we had many conversations about continuing the scholarships and apparently realizing the moral nature of man as we held these discussions. Matty talked of plans for the future of the scholarship program to be followed after his own death.

When I was preparing my column for the May issue of Model Aviation, which concerned the scholarship program, Matty said that he knew he'd been nominated for the Model Aviation Hall of Fame and, he said, that if he received it, he would be the first person to have received every award that the Academy and hobby industry had ever given. At the Nationals this year in Lincoln, we heard that Matty was in the hospital again and not expected to live. Immediately, the votes of the past presidents of the AMA were checked and it was found that Matty Sullivan had been unanimously elected to the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. A telegram was sent telling him of this decision, which he was not only able to read, but which he had framed and hung on his hospital room wall. It was a tribute from the people engaged in the activity he loved best – model aviation – and we are only glad to know that he knew of our esteem before he passed away.



Nats, unknown year, c. 1960s: (left to right) Matty Sullivan, Ed Manulkin (in bus), Sid Axelrod, Frank Garcher, Art Laneau. (Photo Credit: Official Photograph U. S. Navy)

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