



# The AMA History Project Presents: History of the WESTCHESTER RADIO AERO MODELERS, INC (WRAM) Since 1956



Written by DH (11/2008); Edited by WRAM membership, NR and JS (11-12/2008), Reformatted by JS (05/2010)

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*Darryl Hunt, WRAM President, submitted the following history on November 19, 2008.*

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## **THE STORY OF WRAM** *A Brief History of the Westchester Radio Aero Modelers, Inc.*

### **Early Days**

It was 1956, and the Second World War was still a vivid memory for grownups. A pack of Camels sold for 25 cents. You could buy a Chevy roadster for about \$2,000. Texaco's gas was increasing to 29 cents a gallon. And some starry-eyed scientist was publishing an article about putting a man on the moon by the end of the century. They even had some military pilots they called astronauts training for it in Houston. Things were getting so expensive that a few married women were joining the workforce to make ends meet.

Undeterred by the "rising" costs and increasing demands of the post-war era, a handful of model airplane enthusiasts in the White Plains area of New York got together on weekends at an open field to hone their model flying skills. It was not long before the commonality of their pursuits led them to form a club in 1956, which in time became known as the WRAM (Westchester Radio Aero Modelers).

### **Founders and Pioneers**

Frank DeVore, who says he was the eighth WRAM member, counts among the original founders Jack Ruggiero, Ed Pomponi, George Wagner, Charlie Zimmerman, Max Pruner and Alan Sheppard, although he was not as certain about Sheppard. Alice Wagner, George's widow, thinks there were only five founders, since George had the number five. She claims Sheppard worked with her husband, a body and fender man for a Pontiac dealership in Hawthorne Circle, and was later brought into the Club by him. She also thinks Ruggiero joined later, about the same time as DeVore and Bob Foshay. Bob Arnold, who designed the WRAM logo, was member number seven. Both Alice and DeVore agree that Max Pruner was a founder but dropped out of the Club early on. A recently deceased WRAM member and among the first ten members, Andy Medwid, remembered Charlie Zimmerman as one of the founders.

Unless memories improve or facts somehow are resurrected, there seems to be agreement about four of the founders (Pomponi, Zimmerman, Pruner, and Wagner) and doubts about a mysterious

fifth one, possibly Ruggiero, who had a photography shop at the time. WRAM received its official certificate as a non-profit corporation in the State of New York on September 19, 1961. The signers of the incorporation papers included Pomponi, Ruggiero, DeVore, Vincent Yosca, and Foshay.

“It was just a little Club,” Alice claims, “until they got the logo and DeVore and the others joined. They actually started the Club right after George and I were married in 1956. Frank [DeVore] says that we were not really WRAM as we know it until later on. My son was born in ’58. Vinnie Yosca and the others were around by that time. Roy Horn also came around the time of Frank DeVore and Bob Foshay. Roy, who was a state trooper, started the newsletter, the *WRAM’s Horn*.”

### **‘Greatest Generation’ Early Members**

In the Club’s early days, many of the members were World War II and Korean War vets, part of that generation that Tom Brokaw lauds in his book, “The Greatest Generation.” Their families had endured the Great Depression. They were not expecting instant gratification and were ready to tackle a challenge.

One of WRAM’s early members, Nat Weinberg, who became inactive when the Club moved its field to Patterson, New York in 1978, is a former *B-17* bomber pilot. Nat says he got his private pilot license in Pawling in 1942 flying Piper *J2* and *J3 Cubs*. Then he went into the Army Air Corps. “I went to San Antonio to get assigned to primary but the guy says you’ve got about 55 or 60 hours. That’s what they have in basic, so I was sent to be a bomber pilot. There were no options because they needed bomber pilots, as the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force was getting shot all to pieces.

“I went into training on Bamboo bombers. I got a couple hours on them and the instructor said, ‘Hey, you’re okay with this, so we’ll send you over.’ So at the end of 1943 I went over to England as a *B-17* pilot with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force 332<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group. I flew 31 missions. I flew my required 25 missions but D-Day was coming up and they said they could not let us go yet because we need you. We flew three missions D-Day, then right after that three more. You ask me about the hairiest mission we flew. I would have to say all of them.”

Another pioneer, Jim Mahon, who remains a WRAM member, was a glider pilot during WWII and trained other pilots for the invasion of Normandy. “We were in canvas flying coffins,” Jim says. “I would be lying if I told you we weren’t scared.”

In the first decades of Radio Control flying, there were no ready-to-fly or almost-ready-to-fly kits. Either you bought a kit that required 100 percent assembly or you got hold of plans and built from scratch. Even radios were built from scratch.

“The first few years I wasn’t allowed to do too much with the airplanes,” remembered Medwid, former hobby storeowner and National Cash Register technician, with a smile. “Just build them. Finally, we got started flying. RC was just beginning to get popular, so I built one of the early systems. It was a Babcock Magic Carpet. You had to assemble them and solder all the

components. It had a rubber band escapement in it. One beep for the right rudder and two beeps for the left rudder. Of course, the first plane I put it into was a beautiful airplane. I think it was a *Rudder Bug*. I flew it right out of sight.”

Jim Daleo, a retired engineer and currently active flier with WRAM, says he got interested in Radio Control in the early 1950s, after he injured his back and was laid up with time on his hands. “I was going nuts, so my wife Dot bought me a model airplane, a DeBolt trainer at Andy Medwid’s hobby shop in Elmsford. My wife has always supported me in this hobby even though it hasn’t always been so easy.”

Dave Kirschstein, a patent lawyer and early member who still flies at the WRAM field, remembers joining after Daleo. “I think I first came into the WRAMs in 1957, several years after it actually started. Jimmy Daleo and Andy Medwid were already in. Also, Bob Foshay and Frank DeVore. So I think it began 4 or 5 years before that. I know they were flying at other places. When I joined there was a limit of 20 members and there probably were just about that many...20. I think Frank DeVore was one of the founders. I do not remember the names of the other people that were mentioned as founders. But by the time I got in, they weren’t even in there anymore. The only person who is still in the Club now who came in before me is Jimmy Daleo.”

Kirschstein has been helping the Club with legal matters since joining. “I incorporated the Club in the very beginning when I joined. Gradually we raised the limit on the number of members and finally ended up at 60.”

Alan Siegel, another early member who is still active, joined because of Kirschstein. “I think I first came into the WRAMs three or four years before the first Show [WRAM Show]. I started building model airplanes when I was five years old and continued until I discovered girls. Girls lasted for a long time. I ultimately became an attorney, had a family, a house in the suburbs and all that good stuff. I used to commute on the New York Central. One day I was looking over someone’s shoulder and saw that he was reading *Model Airplane News*. I hadn’t built any models in 20 years or more but the virus lingered. The *Model Airplane News* reader was Dave Kirschstein. We started talking and it was through Dave that I discovered the WRAMs and attended my first meeting. I remember visiting Dave and seeing his *Sr. Falcon*, which boggled my mind. At that time it was a very huge airplane and my previous experience ended with Class A free flights with 36” wing spans.”

Another early WRAM member, Ray Windas, who is still active, reflects that the “members have come from all walks of life, gravitating to the common level of modeling, hobby, pastime and a passion for flying. We all came with varying expertise and drive. The hobby, the Club, the field, and the time and effort bring everyone in from different dimensions while being involved in all other parts of life.”

Ray claims that his own case is quite simple. “I had the same curiosity with planes, trains, cars, tractors and untold other types of gadgets and models. That grew with the advent of WWII and the great airplanes that were part of that era. Family members were part of that story and put life into what the models themselves were. The curiosity and intrigue was part of the process of

pursuing engineering after the Navy. That step only caused a greater curiosity to continue to learn and, frankly, RC modeling seemed to again fit the situation. When our children arrived and they put stuff together, we went flying. We met the guys—Andy, Frank, Vinny, Bob and others—and I eventually became a formal member of the WRAMs in the early '60s.”

## **Home Meetings and Growth Pains**

“When we first started,” says DeVore, “we had to be AMA [Academy of Model Aeronautics] members for the insurance, but we weren’t chartered right away. We were a pretty loose organization. In terms of membership numbers, we had limits and kept building it up. Don’t ask me how or when the numbers went up, but they usually went up in fives or tens.”

Bob Foshay, who moved to Arizona in 1996 after almost 40 years with the WRAMs and who recently passed away, said that the Club had 20 members when he joined and the membership had increased considerably by 1960, when he was President. Medwid, who had just married in 1956, said that the members would meet in Bob Arnold’s home about twice a month. Arnold was the President, and already the Club had rules.

In those early days, Club members would meet once or twice a month in each other’s homes until the membership expanded beyond living-room size. Alice Wagner recalls some of the home meetings. “I remember Mary Jane, Eddie Pomponi’s wife, having a fit because they spilled dope or something on her dining room table, so they had to find a meeting place somewhere else.”

The meeting places multiplied almost by the same ratio as the flying fields. “They always had their meetings in different places,” remembers Alice, who still works voluntarily every year during the three days of the WRAM Show at the Westchester County Center, “the Armonk Library and down in Rye for awhile... wherever they could get a meeting hall and have their coffee and doughnuts.”

Daleo remembers meeting at the Scarsdale Legion Hall, when he had a 1962 Austin Healy. The Club members also got together at restaurants around the county. “We used to have big turnouts for the dinners,” according to Alice. “Then we got fancy and fewer people showed up.”

Veteran WRAM member Ron Faanes remembers the Club meeting at Sloan Kettering Walker Lab in Rye, New York, “an actual meeting room, from 1975 to the late '80s, maybe early '90s. We would buy them something we could use for our meetings. One year a coffee pot, another year a TV set, another year a microwave oven. Most of the stuff we got back when the lab closed.”

“The behind-the-scenes efforts and struggles,” Windas recalls, “that went on during the early days were conducted so matter-of-factly they were seamless in the on-going growth of the Club.”

Although the Club met twice monthly in the early days, the by-laws now stipulate once-a-month meetings with mandatory attendance at a minimum of four meetings a year. WRAM met for many years in the Ridgeway Alliance Church in White Plains, New York. The Club customarily

gave a donation for each meeting at the Church, usually November through April. Since November of 2007, meetings have been held in the Valhalla United Methodist Church and a similar donation has been made to this church. The other meetings (May through October) were, and still are, held at the WRAM field in Patterson, New York. If the weather does not oblige, the meetings move to the Patterson Town Hall.

In the early days, the Club's activities were reported in the *WRAM's Horn* newsletter. As David Kirschstein remembers it, "the only *WRAM's Horn* I ever saw was written, edited, and published by Art Byers. I would say that it was, perhaps, a small thing, but at the time it came out many Club members were pleased with having a newsletter as several Radio Control clubs had and still have. The publication included drawings, suggestions, news of occurrences at the flying field and opinions. What Art had to say sometimes was rather controversial, and eventually the *WRAM's Horn* disappeared." Actually, current member Stan Kulesa edited the *WRAM's Horn* in the 1970s. The last issue in the archives is Vol. XIV, No. 5, October 1978.

## Finding Flying Sites

Finding a place to fly before a proprietary field came into the picture was even more difficult than finding meeting places. Jim Daleo recalls those days. "I was number 22, the 22<sup>nd</sup> member to join WRAM. We kept a seniority list by numbers for many, many years. Membership was limited to 20 for the first years of the Club. We really had a close relationship with each member in those years. There was more camaraderie with a closer-knit group.

"I lived in Thornwood and we flew in Grasslands. Vince Yosca was 21. We filled two vacancies in the Club. I may have joined in 1956. There is a picture of me with the DeBolt and my '55 Victoria. I have always been an active member since joining.

"In the early days," Daleo asserts, "you got a successful flight if you took off, flew for two minutes, and landed—a tremendous event. I built my own transmitter because there wasn't much available then. It was a little square box with a 9-foot whip antenna. You would push it into the ground to make sure it was grounded properly. We made servos out of little Mighty Midget motors. You had to have an FCC license and they'd assign you a 27-meg frequency."

Actually, it was the 1950s before AMA was able to obtain the first license-free RC radio frequency, which expanded to five frequencies before the decade ended. In the mid-1960s, AMA petitioned the government for the first 72 MHz frequencies.

"My memories," Daleo recalls, "include the tough times. We had to clean up the fields and pick up the stones. Then you flew or crashed on Sunday, and two weeks later, you'd lose the field.

"As for the fields we flew at: Grasslands; West Lake Drive; Towners with its 100-foot high tall trees; Port Chester High School; White Plains High School; Mahopac; Indian Hill Farm; the Croton Dump, where we dodged sea gulls and hand-launched off where the trucks dumped their garbage; Somers, where IBM is now and we could fly in as guests of another Club; and Muscote Farm."

“The Club lost Muscoot,” says current member Bob Van Tassel, “because then County Supervisor Richard Del Bello’s wife did not want people driving through the farm, as she was afraid of accidents.”

“The first place I flew at,” recalls Kirschstein, “was the Wartburg Estate, the fellow who owned it let us fly there. We gave him a box of cigars each year. Before that, I think they flew at a big company place. I think it was Union Carbide. Those were the days when you couldn’t hold transmitters in your hand. They were ground-based. There was a stone platform to put the transmitters on. The most significant thing was you could only turn left. You had to launch in a way that you couldn’t turn right or you would launch into trees. So everybody learned to fly left. And when we finally got a place where we could turn either way, nobody ever made right turns, at least until they were up in the air.

“When we lost that left-turn field, probably because he wasn’t allowed to let us fly any more or there was an ownership change or something, we looked around and I think the next place we flew was at the old Armonk Airport, which was off [Route] 22, before they reorganized the traffic pattern there. That was a small airport and we used to fly there. That one had the difficulty that you looked into the sun in the afternoon. So you were always blinded if you got into the sun. We used to trim our planes so they would turn a certain way so we knew which way it was turning when we got out of the sun. That was the second place I flew at. I think the next one was up at Zipkin’s farm in Mahopac. Then the horse farm down the road from Mahopac after we couldn’t fly at Zipkin’s place anymore.”

“I don’t remember the names of all the places we flew,” Siegel laments. “I know we flew at the old Armonk airport before IBM was built and I also remember Towners, Somers and a couple of other places, including the Croton ‘dump,’ where I flew a seagull I mistook for my plane. Both the gull and my plane disappeared.”

The search for new fields had its own minefields. Kirschstein tells of one incident. “Bob Foshay and I almost got arrested once. We trespassed on property to see if it was suitable and a cop came in. We had to talk our way out of it. Then we used to drive up into the farm country to see if farmers were interested and that kind of stuff. The officers [of the Club] and the people who helped did a lot of looking around trying to find a place. It was very hard. And the next one after the horse farm might have been where we are now. I don’t remember a place after that before we got here [Patterson].”

In his well-researched document, *Notes Relative To The Purchase of WRAM’s Air Park*, which was prepared for the AMA and meant to be useful to other clubs, Joe Wimbrow writes that as of 1977 some of the WRAM long-time members could recall “during the approximate 20-year history of the Club we had found [and lost] 11 different flying sites.”

Frank DeVore thinks WRAM changed fields 17 or 18 times before owning the current field at Patterson, New York. “I tried figuring it once but I would have to sit down and do it again. We went through about 17 fields...different flying sites. We lost them for various reasons. For a

while, we flew at the end of Hangar E at Westchester County Airport, on a runway there. We flew over at Grasslands. We flew all over the place.”

## Launching the WRAM Show

The hassle of having to keep moving from field to field took its toll on the membership. But it spurred the members into presenting the First Annual Eastern States Radio Control Jamboree. It was held in White Plains, New York, the cradle of Revolutionary War history, according to the July 1969 *WRAM's Horn*. Ten thousand square feet of space was devoted to manufacturers' displays and model exhibits. There were 2,400 paid spectators taking in the products of 14 manufacturers, and 85 model airplanes and boats were on exhibit. Spectators lined up three deep at the booths. The Show was a great success for attendees and vendors alike.

Bob Foshay claimed he started the idea of having a show after attending a Toledo Show. “Medwid, Schroder [Walter] and three or four others supported my proposal, so we launched. There were quite a few naysayers. As they say, ‘Failure is an orphan, but success has a thousand fathers.’ We made several thousand dollars on the first Show but some wanted to divide the money. Instead, we banked it, continued having the Shows, and eventually bought the WRAM field....”

“I was President of the club for the first Show,” recalls Siegel. “Bob Foshay came back from the Toledo Show raving about it and convinced that we should have one, too. It was really Bob's idea and he promoted the hell out of it. I remember going out to Toledo with Walt Schroder of *Model Airplane News* to see what the Show was about. We decided to give it a try. Frank DeVore, Bob, and I went to the County Center to see if we could book time for a model airplane show.

“That was the inception of the first WRAM Show. We only had part of the basement for the first Show. We didn't have the upstairs. It was very exciting. I don't remember how much we made. If I had to guess, I would say \$800. We had done some legislating in anticipation of a problem that we sensed was bound to arise. Somehow, through either the by-laws or whatever, we made it so that all the proceeds of the Show could go only toward the procurement of a club field and not to individual members. Like eating oatmeal, it was the right thing to do! That first Show was the beginning of this beautiful field [Patterson].”

Kirschstein remembers Schroder's outstanding contribution. “Walt Schroder was the editor of *Model Airplane News* [he later moved up to president and publisher of the parent company *Air Age*] and, I would say, a real historic figure in the hobby generally. He joined the Club before I did. He got the idea of having a show on the Eastern Seaboard. The only other one people knew about was in Toledo. Then there might have been some trade shows that had the same purpose. Well, he got behind it and helped organize it. He knew the people who were manufacturers and distributors because they advertised in *Model Airplane News*. So he was the moving force in getting it going. *Model Airplane News* gave a cocktail party on the Fridays before the Show.

“Originally, the Show was only Saturday and Sunday. And they wouldn’t let people sell anything there. But pretty quickly, they started selling permits. Then it went to Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I think the feeling at first was it wasn’t appropriate, that it was just supposed to be to see the manufacturers of the hobby. But the idea of selling there was a pretty compelling one. Very quickly, the qualms went away and you see what it is now. The first Show was in the bottom floor. Then after a year or so, we got the main floor.

“It was at the County Center for years, and then for a year or two we had it at the Yonkers Raceway, which solved the parking problem tremendously. But there were other problems. You could not call out of there because it was a racetrack. This was before cell phones. And the way it was set up you could not move from one end to the other because it was so crowded. You had to walk outside to get to the other end. We were there a couple of years and then came back to the County Center.

“An incident that I remember most when I was President was when the Show got so crowded the fire chief came up and said he was going to shut it down. In those days the area outside wasn’t much of a parking lot. We had demonstrations of helicopters there, which we scheduled for the afternoon. So I got the guy who was in charge of the demonstration and told him we had to do a helicopter demonstration right this minute. This dragged about a third of the people out to watch it. That reduced the crowd and they didn’t close it. Then they dribbled back in and we were okay. They used to park up and down the Bronx River Parkway for about a half mile. And the County Center was furious because they parked all over the place and ripped up the turf. They wouldn’t permit that anymore, of course. That was one of the things I remember.”

The Show, known during its initial years as Eastern States Jamboree, was successful but not easy to plan and execute. “I ran the Show for two years,” Foshay says, “and burned out with the vendor problems and the politics.”

Alice Wagner has had a lot of experience working the Shows. “We had the Show upstairs [in the County Center] and the airplanes on the main floor. Every time they opened the door, the wind would blow the airplanes around. It was terrible. The dealers used to come in there and you’d freeze your butt off. After that, we took over all the floors.

“Before, we had to hang up all the booth curtains. Frank DeVore said to me one time, ‘Go down and get them working, because they all disappear and we have to roll up the curtains.’ So I went down and said, ‘Okay guys, set up the tables and let’s roll up the curtains.’ So we started doing it. Then they came down faithfully every year and said, ‘Alice, we’re here. What do you want us to do?’ Now the County does it.

“One year the Center was under renovation and we had to do the Show at the Yonker’s Race Track.”

The Club had already sponsored some events before taking on the big Show, according to Frank DeVore. “Actually we sponsored two AMA airplane meets—the whole thing, U-Control, Free



Flight and Radio Control, the whole ball of wax. We held them at Westchester County Airport. I would say probably in the early 1960s.”

“Back then,” says Daleo, “we still had only 20 members, and it [the Show] was a lot of work. Frank DeVore ran the Show, like Lou [Scarlino] does now, and he still comes up from Florida every year to help Lou. He used to bust his chops...worked like hell really and truly.”

Scarlino’s experience with the Show has been a baptism of fire. “I got involved in the Show because, as a member, I had to work in the Show. Since I had a financial background, they put me right into the cashier’s window. The guy who had been doing it, Tom Moore, who was a delightful man, died. They had no one to do the financial work for the Club, so I immediately came in and became Treasurer.”

The relationship with DeVore became a lifelong friendship. “Working the Show, Scarlino said, “I became very close friends with Frank DeVore, who is still a very good friend. He taught me everything I know about running the Show. Most of what I do is just what he did. His thought was, and I try to pass it along to the members, the public comes to see the exhibitors not to see WRAM members. So we have to do everything we can to make the exhibitors happy.”

Scarlino has been the WRAM Show manager since about 1999. “I took over managing the Show from Frank about seven or eight years ago--I can’t remember exactly--and Frank mentored me for a couple of years before he gave it up. What was so amazing about it to me was that Frank did everything manually by himself. I had secretarial help at the office until I retired in 2007. I have everything on the computer. But I cannot begin to tell you how many hours it takes to do the Show. It’s not bragging or anything. It’s a major undertaking. It’s a big operation, and it’s important to the Club, so someone has to do it. Fortunately, now I have Danny Carozza, and I had Stan Kulesa before. Bob Van Tassel and many of the guys offer their help and I take them up on it, because I just cannot do it alone. I don’t have the time. But it’s well worthwhile.”

During the process of managing the Show, Scarlino has seen some “sea changes.” “At one time, we did everything. We put up all of our own drapery. We moved things around. We brought the freight in, moved it to the exhibitors’ area. We set up all the tables and put the chairs up. But now that the Club has aged, we pay to have it done. The guys just don’t have the will and/or the ability to do it anymore. I have the freight company move all the exhibitors’ displays into their booth spaces, with the help of our members who are capable. The County Center does the rest of the work for us.”

Managing the Show is a gargantuan undertaking in itself. “We have the second largest show, behind Toledo, which is much larger,” Scarlino asserts. “As far as Westchester County is concerned, it is the biggest event that takes place in the County Center by far. For the three days, we have the largest attendance and we take up the entire County Center, every square foot of it. No other exhibitor does that--both levels, all the meeting rooms, all of the private dressing rooms. We take it all because we need the space. We can even use more space.”

The WRAM Show is the largest three-day event of its kind in the eastern United States. It features a wide array of competition-based static displays, manufacturer exhibits, seminars, racetrack, youth events, and much more that cater to those interested in radio-controlled model airplanes, helicopters, boats, and cars. The Club's focus is to advance the interests of model aviation, and this event attracts exhibitors and spectators from throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe.

The Swap Shop is a very popular show attraction for modelers. John Isbister has been managing the Swap Shop almost three decades. "This is the 38<sup>th</sup> Show [2007, without counting the cancelled year]," Isbister says, "and I probably have run the Swap Shop for 35 of them." A Show event that attracts young participants is the WRAM Flyer Program. WRAM member Tony Tartaglia has led this aspect of the Show for many years. According to Tartaglia, "through this program, we help children build rubber-powered model airplanes. It takes about 30 minutes, and once they're finished, they get to fly them and bring them home. It gives them a great sense of accomplishment and hopefully starts them on a fun and rewarding hobby."

"It's great to have worked the Show as a 'professional' ticket-taker at the gate since it began," Windas says. "The WRAM Show is a model of how to get things done, despite the undertows, cross-currents, rip tides and all sorts of interference."

### **Hat in the Ring**

The Hat in the Ring program, introduced by the WRAM Club in 1996, is based on a unique concept using an historic aviation symbol. "Our goal," says Hank Nielsen, who originated the idea, "was to encourage and help kids become involved in the hobby of model aviation. Thinking about historic or thematic tie-ins, we sought permission to use the famous 'Hat in the Ring Squadron' symbol. This air-wing squadron, one of the first in the U.S., was formed during World War I and made famous by such flyers as Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, the leading U.S. ace.

"The idea was to get adults to help kids learn about aviation by throwing their 'hats in the ring,' just as the daring WWI flyers did in helping the allies win the war in France. After some effort, we obtained official U.S. Air Force permission to use the symbol. It's interesting to note that the historic squadron is still active as the 94<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron. Instead of SPAD and Nieuport biplanes, it now flies F-15 Eagle jets."

In addition to conceiving the Hat in the Ring youth program, Hank also designed the Wrampager airplane, plans for which have gone all over the world and were probably the first such for an airplane model to appear on the world wide web.

WRAM's Hat in the Ring program assists teachers, scout leaders, parents, and civic groups to help kids develop airplane-modeling skills through classroom presentations and demonstrations, training sessions on and off WRAM's airfield, subsidized teaching aids, including model materials and flight-training videos, Internet instructions, and email inquiry and response.

“Seeing just one young enthusiast pick up on his own where we leave off with our initial instruction and materials makes all our efforts more than repaid,” says Bob Tiernan, who chaired Hat in the Ring from 2004 to 2008. The distributed materials range from trainer planes to radios to videotapes made possible by raffle income from the Hat in the Ring booth at the WRAM Show and through donations from Radio Control vendors and others.

Pomeraug High School in Southbury, Connecticut has been one of the beneficiaries of the Hat in the Ring program. In a letter to WRAM, Jim Knapp of the Technical Education Department wrote, “The students and faculty at Pomperaug High would like to express our gratitude for the wonderful donation of twenty Futaba RC servos and related hardware. Also, we would like to thank you for sharing your time and expertise at our annual student field day(s) at the F.L.Y.R.C. Field, Mitchell’s farm, Southbury, CT. The representatives of your outstanding organization not only help bring our students to a new level of technological understanding but also serve as exemplary models.”

### **Landing a Proprietary Field**

With income from the Show, the membership decided it was time to look for a proprietary field. The search was on to locate property in a pastoral setting that could be purchased and dedicated solely to flying. An active Field Finding Committee began the scouting in 1970, which included flying full-scale planes over a wide area. One of the pilots was WRAM member Ken Smalley, who now lives in Georgia. The Club subsidized his airplane rentals when he was trying to find a field.

Joe Wimbrow notes that the Field Finding Committee succeeded in locating an acceptable site in 1975 off Route 129 in Croton, the former Croton Sky Park, which was almost ideally central to the memberships’ residences in Westchester County. Unfortunately, because of a lawyer’s error in the announcement of intent to purchase and the Club’s unprepared approach to town meetings, the intended purchase was not approved. “Effectively,” writes Wimbrow, “we went to the meetings, hat in hand, and asked, ‘May we fly our planes in your territory?’ We had not presented to the board or residents any advantage to them if they approved our permit.”

After many flights, queries, and searches by car, Don Kilgus found an ideal property across the Westchester line in Putnam County with the help of a real estate agent on a rainy Sunday afternoon in the fall of 1977. He went to the Patterson Town Hall and found out who owned it. It was an 81.48-acre lot off Route 311, farmland formerly owned by Mortimer H. Dykeman, Jr., and his wife, Gloria, which had been sold to a consortium of developers [Brookside Associates].

“You have to thank Tom Moore and Joe Wimbrow,” recalls Frank DeVore. “They were the moving forces, Tom Moore especially because of his ability to finance it. We signed personal notes, but we didn’t have to put anything up. He [Tom] bent a few arms at the bank. Tom was the treasurer of a big company... Joe Wimbrow worked along with Tom on it. He was with IBM.”

Joe Wimbrow estimates that during the six or seven years of the search, with an increasing level of activity each year, in 1975 and 1976 alone, he personally visited and walked around on 29 sites and drove by almost 20 others. During the 14 months between the deposit and the closing on the field, Tom Moore, the Treasurer, and Wimbrow, the President, spent an average of 6 to 12 hours per week on the project, a total of 500 man-hours. By early April 1977, Wimbrow and Moore were close to getting an agreement with the owners to purchase the field, so they hired Mr. Edward I. Sumber of Carmel, New York, a lawyer experienced in local real estate law and permits, to represent WRAM.

Kirschstein also had a hand in the selection. "As far as our field is concerned, I wasn't involved except to help get a local lawyer. We had to get a guy who had knowledge of the local laws and real estate. I'm a patent lawyer, so I do not know that much about it. I participated to some extent but the guy we picked did the legal work. I remember that we went to the town to put our case before them. It was my first picture of how small town America works. These local citizens were running their own meeting. I'd never seen that. I had started in the city. We had an elderly guy then, Tom Powers, who knew about this type of thing. He knew how to handle it. We presented our case and got the resolution that is all on the record. You've got that in the archives, the records approving us."

Wimbrow, Moore, and Sumber attended a Patterson Town Board meeting on April 13, 1977, to explain the need to allow model airplane flying on 75 of the almost 82 acres to be purchased. Their presentation included a demonstration of Moore's scale WACO, wiggling its control surfaces with a transmitter. On the afternoon of May 7, 1977, they organized a flying demonstration on site for members of the Town Board, Zoning Board, Planning Board, the City Engineer and local residents.

After several more meetings and presentation of documentation, including the Club's Field Rules and an engineering report on sound levels, the permit was finally approved on January 27, 1978. In the permit application, the engineering report prepared by William F. Zeller, Associate of Mahopac, stated, "Ninety-five (95) percent of the property will remain as is with the remaining five (5) percent being used by the APPLICANT. Virtually all the land, if used as proposed, will remain forever green." A later meeting with the Town's Environmental Protection Committee clarified that "forever green" was not meant as a permit restriction.

Actually, 18 WRAM members signed liens against their home mortgages for a bank loan for the closing on April 7, 1978, to cover the difference in the Club's cash payment and the negotiated price. The mortgage was paid out in full and discharged by the bank six years later, on November 13, 1984.

After work was completed on the runway, access road and parking lot, the field was officially opened with a "Dedication and Grand Opening" on July 15, 1978. The Town Supervisor did the ribbon-cutting honors with many Town officials, residents, and media in attendance. Flight demonstrations, of course, accompanied the ceremony. The successful event was chronicled in the local papers.

Shortly afterward, the following October, the Club secured an easement on the southern end of the field. Then, in 1985, an adjacent farm and old house owned by the Evans Product Company, a Delaware corporation headquartered in Horsham, Pennsylvania, came on the market and the Club decided to make a bid for it. The bid was accepted and the 5.79-acre plot was added, giving the field a total of 87.27 acres, plus a right of way on the south end of the field in common with Mortimer Dykeman, his heirs and assigns forever. There was a well and an old house/barn on the new plot. Hank Nielsen, who was Club President at the time, suggested offering the old structure to anyone who would dismantle it and haul it off. Hank then arranged for the offer to be quickly taken up by a local farmer, which represented a savings of \$10,000 for the Club.

Things have gone smoothly with the town and the Patterson community ever since. At one point, a group of developers proposed to the town that part of the field be designated a landfill dumping ground, but the town supported WRAM's opposition to such a project. For the past several years, WRAM has made a donation to the Patterson Day festivities and has sponsored flight demonstrations and an open invitation to the WRAM field in conjunction with the annual celebration.

On May 25, 1992, in honor of Frank DeVore's hard work on the WRAM Shows and his dedication to the Club, the field was officially named the Frank DeVore Field. There is a dedication plaque at the field by the radio impound stand.

### **By-Laws, Rules and Responsibilities**

The oldest set of bylaws found in the archives was adopted by the WRAM in June 1967. At that time, membership was limited to 50 members. The annual dues, if paid in advance, were \$18, otherwise \$1.75 per month. By 1978, membership was limited to 60 and so, stated in WRAM's appeal for its authorization of Radio Control flight at the WRAM field.

The Club has three types of members: voting members 18 years of age or older; junior members who are 14 to 18 years old and have been voted into full membership; and probationary members. As amended in 2007, the bylaws state that all members are expected to attend at least four meetings a year, complete a full day of field marshal duty during the flying season, and fill assignments during the three days of the WRAM Show.

In order to ensure the safety of the members and maintain good relations with the community, WRAM has developed a set of safety and sound field rules. There is an oversight committee but each member is expected to help enforce the rules.

Among the most important rules is the prohibition against flying alone without another responsible adult present. This is an obvious precaution in case of an accident, such as a propeller cut, or a heart attack, stroke, etc.

Limitations are also imposed on the amount of sound allowable. All two-stroke engines, regardless of size, are not to exceed 96 decibels at a distance of 9 feet from the engine on the ground. All four-stroke engines and gasoline engines, regardless of size, are not to exceed 98

decibels at 9 feet. These sound limitations, along with the restriction disallowing glow or gas engines running before 11 am on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, before 9 am other mornings or after dusk any evening, were established as a courtesy to our neighbors and in order to avoid complaints from nearby residents.

### **Club Awards**

Over the years, the WRAM Club established two awards: the Walter Schroder Cup to honor a WRAM member who has made an outstanding contribution to the Club, and the Howard McEntee Memorial Award to recognize and pay tribute to great contributors and innovators in the hobby of radio control.

“Walter Schroder,” according to WRAM member David Kirschstein, “was one of the giants of the model airplane hobby, right up there with Bill Winters, who was his predecessor at *Model Airplane News*. He did a lot for the hobby and, of course, for the WRAMs. I joined the Club because Walter called me after I sent him a postcard asking a question about getting into RC. He suggested coming to a meeting of the WRAMs. Also, he told me later that he himself had joined the WRAMs because R/C was the coming thing in the model airplane hobby and he wanted to learn about it. His oldest son, John, as well as Butch, was a member, and both of them were very good flyers. Walt didn’t fly much, but he had a large store of knowledge and know-how with regard to model building, flying, trimming, engines, you name it. He also, as Alan [Siegel] says, was a force in the WRAM Show. He knew the companies in the model airplane business, and for years he had *Model Airplane News* host a cocktail party before the Show.”

The first Schroder Cup was awarded in 1962. It is awarded periodically by the officers of the Club in consultation with an awards committee.

The Walt Schroder awardees are:

- 1962 - Bob Foshay
- 1963 - John Schroder
- 1964 - George Wagner
- 1965 - George Wagner
- 1966 - Lew Sabato
- 1967 - Frank DeVore
- 1968 - Frank DeVore
- 1969 - Joe Schmidt, Sr.
- 1970 - Bob Ehrlich
- 1971 - Jack Ruggiero
- 1972 - Joe Wimbrow
- 1973 - Joe Schmidt, Sr.
- 1974 - Ken Smalley
- 1975 - Lucky DiRubbo
- 1976 - Tom Moore
- 1977 - Tom Moore
- 1978 - Frank DeVore

1979 - Ed Pomponi  
1980 - Dave Kirschstein  
1981 - Don Kilgus  
1982 - Ron Faanes  
1983 - John Isbister  
1984 - Lou Scarlino  
1985 - Hank Nielsen  
1986 - Vince Perillo  
1987 - Frank DeVore  
1989 - Jerry Judge  
1992 - Lou Scarlino  
1995 - Vince Perillo  
1996 - Hank Nielsen  
2000 - Alan Wasserman  
2002 - Jim Onorato  
2004 - Bob Van Tassel

The McEntee award is granted annually by the Club and given to the honoree at the WRAM Show. The WRAM President and Officers consider nominations and choose the recipient, who is provided expenses to receive the award at the Show. Howard McEntee was an early developer and experimenter instrumental in helping the new hobby start its development toward the amazingly reliable systems we have today. When Howard died in 1972, Bob Foshay encouraged the Club to begin an award in McEntee's name that would recognize others with the pioneering spirit and accomplishments exemplified by its namesake. Since its inception in 1973, the McEntee Award has been presented to 39 distinguished pioneers of radio control, including a special award to Bob Foshay.

The McEntee awardees are:

1973 - Maynard Hill  
1974 - Ed Lorenz  
1975 - Bill and Walt Good  
1976 - Don Mathes; Doug Spreng  
1977 - Bob Dunham  
1978 - Phil Kraft  
1979 - Gerry Nelson  
1980 - Hal DeBolt  
1981 - Paul Runge  
1982 - Bob Aberle  
1983 - Nick Zioli  
1984 - Carl Goldberg  
1985 - Bob Novak  
1986 - George Myers  
1987 - Fred Marks  
1988 - Don Lowe  
1989 - Bill Hershberger

1990 - John Worth  
1991 - George Steiner  
1992 - Bill Winter  
1993 - Cliff Weirick  
1994 - Don Brown  
1995 - Art Schroeder  
1996 - Bill Northrop; Bob Foshay (special Club award to founder)  
1997 - Jack R. Albrecht  
1998 - Carl Schwab  
1999 - Leon Shulman  
2000 - Norm Rosenstock  
2001 - Abbott Lahti  
2002 - Hazel Sigafoose  
2003 - Dave Brown  
2004 - Pete Reed  
2005 - Tom Hunt  
2006 - Stuart Richmond  
2007 - Dave Platt  
2008 - Henry Haffke

### **Looking Ahead**

Looking back, it is obvious that WRAM brought into its ambit many different personalities from many different walks of life. Looking ahead, it depends on the new generations and their interest in aviation. “On a personal note,” says Ray Windas, “the WRAMs were an example we used with our children as they were growing up. We built models and flew them. Some crashed and we rebuilt them. We built radios, gadgets, and models that we fixed and flew again. The boys went on to be engineers, but have moved on to other careers. Our daughter is in the school-counseling area. One son spent 10 years as a Navy aviator and is now with United. The other son worked for Hughes on the Galileo Space Probe. So the WRAMs are unique; they are passionate about the Club, the field, the Show, and most importantly, in what they each believe on those subjects.”

The Club, in spite of its members’ advanced median age, tries to keep abreast of the times. It has had a website, [www.wram.org](http://www.wram.org), for almost a decade. Hank Nielsen provided the copy and photos for the initial website and Jonathan Siegel designed the layout. Several WRAM members publish reviews of the latest planes in leading Radio Control magazines. Other members contribute their time, monies, and planes to the Hat in the Ring youth program.

Still the Club faces its challenges with all the distractions the modern world offers, as Alan Siegel points out: “If we don’t attract young people, I think the Club’s future is very limited. I don’t know what the average member age is, but I think its pretty ‘senior.’”

“The old-timers grew up when aviation was king. It was the glamour field. Now the kids are into their computer games and space. I don’t think they relate to prop-driven airplanes. When I was a



kid, *Flying Aces* was the magazine I ran to the newsstand for every month. *Flying Models* is its successor. When I go through *Flying Models* there are guys in their 60s, 70s, and 80s still flying rubber-band models and having a wonderful time, but you don't see a lot of young people in those pictures. I don't understand how this hobby is supporting all of the equipment I see in the magazines.

“The Club has always enjoyed a membership comprised of diverse and decent human beings. This has not changed and is, I believe, the secret to its success. Meetings used to be quite spirited. There were factions, there were arguments, and it was very political at times. The thing that's amazing about this Club is that it runs so absolutely smoothly and so harmoniously. If only the rest of the world could follow our example! That seems to be a good note upon which to end this.”

Darryl Hunt, WRAM President  
November 19, 2008

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