



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of FRANK GARCHER

March 3, 1928 – May 22, 1999
Started modeling in the mid-1930s
AMA #302



Written by Frank's friends and volunteers; Transcribed by NR (06/1999); Edited by SS (2002), Updated by JS (09/2008, 01/2017), Reformatted by JS (08/2009)

Career:

- Started as a teenager clerk for Midwest Model Supply; worked his way up to President of the company
- Was an organizer and supporter of model education in the school system
- Was a fundraiser for many worthy AMA projects
- Was a big booster for model aviation being taught in the school system
- Always put his money where his mouth was
- Was loved by all; his greeting usual was “How ya doing, Tiger?”

Honors:

- 1984: AMA Fellows
- 1989: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1998: AMA Keeper of the Flame Award

Frank Garcher was one of those gregarious people that everyone just likes. Besides being a “people” person, he was the genuine article. Frank was generous to a fault and a great supporter of the AMA and the hobby industry. He believed and supported model aviation education. If a problem presented itself and funds were needed to help out, Frank would reach into his own pocket to help out. If it was a bigger problem, Frank had friends who would also dig in to help. His presence at trade shows will be sorely missed.

History of Midwest Products Co. Inc.

Mr. Frank Garcher, president of Midwest Products Co. Inc., became a hobby enthusiast and contest flyer at a very early age. During the 7th and 8th grades, Frank began working as a clerk in a Chicago hobby shop, Midwest Model Supply, owned by Mr. Wallace Simmers. Frank continued his part-time work at Midwest Model Supply while attending St. Rita High School and DeKalb University. During these years Midwest Model Supply experienced a great deal of growth, establishing their own manufacturing and distribution division, located in Chicago.

Midwest Products Company was founded in the 1940s as a result of the growth in the manufacturing division of Midwest Model Supply. In 1951, Midwest Products Company moved to the eastern portion of Gary, Indiana (known as Miller). After a mid-1950s stint in the Army, Frank returned to Midwest Products Company to manage the firm, which had three employees, approximately 1,500 square feet of space and a small inventory.

Today the company has considerably more employees and has grown to 53,000 square feet of

space.

The above was all the information that was available at the time of his death. Frank was one of those people who were so involved with life that he was never able to find the time to make a record of his life.

What follows below are letters, e-mails and photos from friends who are shocked at the loss of this great guy. We all will miss Frank – more and more as time grinds on, as the magnitude of the loss sinks in.

From: Tom Sanders
To: Dick Baxter
Subject: Frank Garcher's Passing
Date: Monday, May 24, 1999 9:43 AM

Dick,

Would you please post this to the Free Flight list...?

With deep sorrow and regret, I must relay that Frank Garcher, president of Midwest Products Co., Inc., passed away 7:22 a.m., Saturday morning, May 22, 1999. The modeling world has lost a dynamic person dedicated to the hobby and the hobbyist.

I have had the unique privilege for the last three years of being included within Frank's wonderful world of model flying and his many, many friends in the model flying community. Frank was an awesome personality, a born promoter with extraordinary drive to match. He was always effervescent when we discussed anything to do with his first love, Free Flight and he especially enjoyed following the successful developments with Science Olympiad and TSA. Though not quite as well known, Frank was equally passionate at guiding hundreds of charitable endeavors, too. Truly, Frank was a big man who was almost larger than life itself.

I will miss him most when I remember our lengthy “strategy sessions” that seemed to always include Frank's ability to recall the historical people and events of both the full scale and the model aviation communities. Meeting many famous flyers vicariously through Frank's eyes will always be my most treasured moments.

God bless you with a safe journey Frank!

Farewell,
Tom Sanders

Subject: I'm Sad...
Date: Monday, May 24, 1999 10:52 PM

My Fellow Modelers,

It is 9 p.m. on May 24, 1999 and I just read a most brief post that one of my best buddies, long time friend, and mentor Frank Garcher passed away and that his funeral is tomorrow. There is no way I can go and it is too late to do anything else in tribute - except emote here.

I won't blame you if you “click” elsewhere but will be grateful to have you share with me...

It seems like I've known Frank forever. He was stationed here in New Mexico just after we became a state. Holloman AFB in Alamogordo was just over the mountains from Walker AFB in Roswell where I was stationed. Frank was a free flighter back then and I even then dreamed RC (Radio Control).

Soon after he got out he was in the model business and I was a most enthusiastic customer. The Esquire series were wonderful and I just couldn't get enough of 'em.

Best of all though (IMHO) was the Hustler Delta XD-7. Did you know the plans are copyrighted 1957?? I've had at least a dozen of them and as I write there is one hanging in my garage, with retracts, charged and ready to fly. The last time I spoke with Frank on the phone I asked (for the hundredth time) for permission to kit it under my trade name. He always left me with the impression that he was planning to re-kit it himself. It was (and is) 40 years ahead of its time.

Frank traveled a lot but when possible he would arrange a layover to visit us and he was always concerned with the health of both my lovely wife and me. Of course, I was more concerned about him and our conversations always addressed our latest weight and blood sugar levels (we're both diabetics). I always envied him because he could get his physical renewed and my doctor made me promise to “give it up.”

Maybe the best of all was “party time” at trade shows and big model gatherings. Frank aka “The Big Stoop” was the ultimate modelers’ party animal. His easy manner and humble friendliness made him the man to be with (or near) in order to see all who were there. Toledo was where he really put the frosting on the cake. Consummate host is not adequate enough to describe his congeniality.

Truly best of all and not known by but a very few people was his unlimited generosity. I have no idea how far and wide it went (and I bet only God knows for sure) but I can tell you Frank’s giving \$\$\$ exactly when and where they were needed saved many a model business, trade show, contests (both big and small) special events and even the AMA.

I'm gonna miss him big time and even if you are still reading and do not know him - I promise you that you too will miss him. He's not leaving big shoes friends - he is leaving a gaping hole in our hearts and our modeling lives.

Farewell and fine flying, good, and faithful friend. Figure out the best way to do it and I'll be along shortly,

With the love only fliers feel,
Jim Simpson

Frank Garcher (1928 – 1999)

From Jim Newman

“How ya doin’ Tiger?”

Sadly, the hobby industry will no longer hear that familiar cheerful greeting or see the outstretched hand, topped by the inevitable broad smile. Frank Garcher, co-owner and CEO of Midwest Products Company, passed away on Saturday, May 22, 1999 of heart failure at the age of 71 years.

Born in Briar Hill, Pennsylvania then moving to Chicago, Frank's passion was flying and, in his younger years, he was an active modeler and competitor and also a member of the famed Chicago Aeronuts with whom he frequently demonstrated his skills in both Free Flight and early Radio Control (RC) contests. It was not long before he expanded his talents to include full size aviation with a particular a passion for sailplanes.

During World War II, Frank served his country in the US Army, and on leaving the service, he became involved with the hobby industry and eventually bought into Chicago-based Midwest Model Distributors. Later, in company with Wally Simmers of Gollywock and Jaberwock fame, he opened Midwest Products in Miller, Indiana not far from the present site of the company. It was here that Frank established the famous line of Micro Cut balsa wood, selling the product to local modelers.

With business booming through the introduction of a range Free Flight and U-Control kits the company outgrew its miller building so, in 1960 Frank moved the company to an industrial building in nearby Hobart. Here he rapidly expanded the company to include a whole range of modeling materials, including aircraft plywood and exotic woods and kits for both the hobby and craft markets. Not only did Frank foresee the company's growing role in the hobby field, but he brought the organization to the fore in custom cutting for other companies and in the production of wooden non-hobby related items.

Frank was an avid promoter of the hobby to young people and to educators, in particular, as a means of increasing students' interest in education, and to this end, he often appeared on local TV to promote hobby shows and the hobby in general. He also became notorious throughout the industry as fundraiser. The success of many events was due entirely to his one-man forays to extract monies from those whose wallets he considered could withstand the onslaught. His opinion was that those who gained wealth from the industry should now consider it time to give something in return. The purchase of the AMA Muncie site was one such project which had his unwavering support and for which he actively sought donations. The result of his tireless efforts caused his induction into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

Frank Garcher was an extremely sympathetic and caring man and many an employee in times of hardship was assisted by a personal financial gift quietly slipped into the hand in an unobserved

moment. Children, too, have been surprised by such items as an autographed baseball, obtained from one of the Chicago games where Frank was an avid spectator.

Most memorable were the Midwest parties on the top floor of Toledo's Holiday Inn and headed up by Frank. Above the din could be heard the strains of "Bye Bye Blackbird," rendered by Frank and friends on the banjo with Frank's sometimes slightly off-key and often inaccurate wording coming through it all!

Frank loved to travel and his journeys on behalf of Midwest Products took him to Ecuador and Columbia in search of balsa suppliers, to Japan, Taiwan, China, Germany, and Korea in search of new business and products or to other countries at the invitation of various dignitaries. Employees often wondered if he had stock in Kodak because the aftermath of his travels was invariably a veritable mountain of photographs for their enjoyment.

It was said that Frank had "presence." When he was in a room, no matter how big that room, everyone knew he was there! Being big in stature, Frank had a loud and infectious laugh; his practical joking knew no bounds. The hobby industry the world over will be a sadder place without Francis S. Garcher.

Our sympathies are extended to his wife, Rosemary, his two daughters, Sue Zimmerman and Carol Seibal, and his son Michael.

"It was only a day or so after arriving home from the Muncie Reunion that I heard about the passing of Frank Garcher. Tom Ailes, one of our most active members, wrote to tell me of this loss. Frank is deeply mourned by Tom as by us all. "Big Stoop," as many of us knew him, was so big, so strong, so filled with life and humor it seemed nearly impossible that he was gone. But, it is so." – Harold deBolt

Excerpt from the VR/CS Newsletter

The end of the generation that had much to do with creating today's model aviation is approaching. One by one, we see pioneers pass on and for model aviation, it is sad.

Recently we lost Frank Garcher. His passing was very unexpected as he fondly looked forward to retirement. Frank was MY FRIEND and friend to the world's modelers and industry members. All loved him as a genial, good-hearted fellow that achieved great things in this hobby/sport.

In post WW II model aviation, all crafts were in dire need of supplies, the war had drained the shelves. Thus, it was a prime time to enter the hobby industry. Modelers Frank Garcher and Wallace Simmers were very active in the Chicago area and as such were aware of the needs. They organized Midwest Products and, with a demanding market, the business grew rapidly with balsa wood its major product. Providing modeling woods became the heart of Midwest and that continues to today.

It was also apparent that metal was needed as badly as wood. Since the production requirements

are as different as night and day, Simmers organized K&S Engineering to produce basic metal products for the model industry. A decision was made: Frank would operate Midwest and Wallace K&S, with the association continuing at the business level and through friendship.

With time Frank expanded Midwest into most hobby phases; he was a genius in recognizing needs and opportunity.

Beyond the wood products, Midwest became a source for model airplane and boat kits, accessories, model railroad supplies, dollhouses and other items. Today's offerings are among the most expensive in the industry. The Midwest operation and facility expanded steadily, the factory is both very modern and large. Frank developed very specialized saws for cutting balsa wood. Wood production devours ship container loads of reprocessed balsa steadily, there is no scrap left.

Frank was quick to recognize the future of RC and early on Midwest offered the successful Esquire series. Over the years offerings followed trends that were extensive in quantity and always quality.

Frank Garcher was a family man, enjoying life with his lovely wife and daughters. This attitude extended to his employees who were just as cherished as "family." While Frank was "Midwest," the factory was not. Direction was provided but production and operation was left to the good people he had operating Midwest, a very successful system.

Frank and Midwest was of the "old line" hobby manufacturers. He felt the hobby was built on hobby shops that served at the local level and brought new people into the scheme of things. Frank felt this was the correct philosophy and Midwest stayed with the manufacturer-distributor-dealer procedure. Today Midwest Products is a multi-million dollar industry and Frank Garcher built it.

Frank was also an AMA man, through and through. He was always there whether it needed funds, time, and/or effort. An example: Midwest has produced a million plus kits for the AMA Delta Dart program and at cost price.

I would be remiss if I did not offer my thanks for the help he gave me. At one point, my Dmeco was caught short in plywood supply. Without a question, Frank filled our needs until the shortage stabilized. There were many such cases throughout the industry. Frank Garcher always helped.

Shortly after Dmeco closed down the phone rang. T'was Frank, "Hal, it's too early for you to leave the model industry. Your expertise is still needed. Why don't you come to Hobart and join Midwest?" For me a move was out of the question, but Frank allowed us to establish a "Design Center" at my place. It worked just fine!

My close association for several years with Frank and the Midwest "family" was one of the most memorable periods of my life, great stuff! To be associated with such a man was a great honor.

As our preface suggested the generation that founded today's model aviation is sadly leaving us. Recently Bill Winter, with his media efforts, and now Frank Garcher. For most of us, words cannot describe the loss such people represent.

-Hal deBolt (May 1999)



1994: Frank, the RC pilot

The following is from the "President's Perspective" in the September 1999 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

THIS HAS BEEN a month of emotional highs and lows.

One of the nice things I get to do as AMA president is present the Hall of Fame awards to many inductees. This is one of the things I look forward to. Unfortunately, sometimes this means making a posthumous presentation to the family of the inductee.

John Grigg, with whom I served on the Executive Council for many years died in August 1996. He was voted into the Hall of Fame this past year, and a celebration banquet was held in Lockport, N.Y. for the presentation. It was great to see the number of people who attended.

I presented the plaque to John's wife, Joan Grigg, amongst a flood of pictures and memories of John's life in model aviation. It was a great success, and it kindled a lot of great memories of my travels with John while he was AMA president.

Some of the pictures were somewhat incriminating! If you see any of that gang, perhaps they can explain the gorilla, or maybe they will show you that picture of the District III VP [Vice President] Bob Brown wearing the wildest pair of bell-bottoms you have ever seen!

It was a great evening, even though it was difficult in many ways to accept John's passing.

WHEN I arrived home the next day, there was terrible news on my answering machine: Frank Garcher of Midwest Products had died of a heart attack on Saturday morning. AMA, and all of aeromodeling, lost a great friend on May 22.

Few have any idea of the contributions Frank made. Any time you heard of a program introducing kids to aeromodeling, Frank's name was not too far away. He supported programs for kids in more ways than I can count, and was a strong supporter of AMA.

Frank was the point man for almost every cooperative program between the aeromodeling industry and the AMA. When it came time to raise funds to support various AMA programs, Frank was leading the effort.

Frank was a big man in the industry, both figuratively and literally. His wisdom and experience will be missed by the entire industry. He was nicknamed "Big Stoop," after the character in the old *Terry and the Pirates*, as a tribute to his dogged loyalty and reliability. It was a moniker that he wore proudly.

At his funeral, his son-in-law said it best: "Frank had three loves in his life beyond his family: airplanes, music, and people."

As Frank had requested, some Dixieland music was played at the funeral as the final tribute. That was so much like him, as he was the consummate party person. Frank never saw a piano or a banjo player he would not get up and sing with. The parties he hosted the Toledo show were legendary, and always featured a banjo player and Dixieland jazz.

During the calling hours, someone said it quite well: "If anyone proposes a moment of silence for Frank Garcher, it would have to be someone who didn't know him."

Ironically, right after hearing the news on my answering machine, I opened the mail and found the July Model Aviation. In Joyce Hager's column was a picture of Frank, along with Ralph Warner, presenting me with checks from RCHTA in support of AMA's education programs.

Frank always supported any effort to get aeromodeling into the classrooms. His company, Midwest Products, is one of the only companies in our industry to have a full-time education department.

That picture of Frank was probably the last "official" photograph taken of him. It showed him well, smiling up a storm, and presenting the results of a fund-raising effort to support aeromodeling.

I think Frank's son-in-law got it close, but not quite right. Frank loved people first, followed by airplanes and music, in whichever order. Frank was the biggest "people person" I've ever known. I'm sure if St. Peter asked Frank what he wanted, he would answer "Balsa, a banjo player and an audience." That would define heaven for Frank Garcher.

We'll sure miss him.

Dave Brown

AMA President

This is an article that was published in the July 1970 issue of American Modeler magazine; it ran on page 20. Frank Anderson submitted this article and there are accompanying illustrations in Garcher's photo file.

Mr. 'G' Goes to Ecuador

By Frank Garcher

AFTER 20 years of waiting, the day, July 20, finally arrived to leave for Ecuador. Sam Grober was to be my traveling companion for the next seven days on a most fantastic trip. Sam speaks Spanish and German, and I constantly called upon him to let me know what was going on.

We flew to Miami and picked up a Braniff International jet for Guayaquil, Ecuador. Making a short stop at Panama to change pilots and crew, we arrived at Guayaquil at 8:00 p.m. and met Jean and Jacques Kohn, owners of Balsa Ecuador Lumber Corp.

At 7:00 a.m., the bellboy brought essence of coffee, a black syrup that you pour cold in your coffee cup about-1/2 inch deep. Add hot water and you have the greatest wake-up stimulus. Our day ran from 7:00 until midnight, but the next morning I was sure to be awake after that first cup. Breakfast usually was fresh pineapple slices. With pieces of lime that you squeezed over them – it was a new taste sensation. We then ate ham and eggs (at least that's what it said on the menu) and this started our day.

Jean and Jacques Kohn, the two brothers who own Balsa Ecuador Corp., were to be our hosts for the next five days. The trip from the hotel to the mill is about a 10-mile ride - if you keep your eyes closed and don't watch the driving. With your eyes wide open it is a laugh a minute. I think the driving motto down in Ecuador is "keep 'em between the buildings."

At the mill, we spent two days going over all the specs for the balsa shipments to Midwest. We covered all the mill operations from the logs coming down the river to the mill, forming huge rafts, to final shipments to our plant. The logs at the mill were 9 to 12 feet long, very green, and wet. Also very heavy. The logs were then cut on a head saw and are very wet to the touch. After the log is cut to 3-1/4 to 3-1/2 in. Thickness the wood must be hand-stacked in uniform stacks on flat rail cars to be rolled into the kilns. The kilns are really giant steam heated ovens that bake out the water to dry out the wood. If this is done too fast, the logs come out of the kilns with internal checks and splits that can be spotted only when cut. The amount of hourly records kept on each load of wood and the consistent checking to insure quality amazed me.

The logs cut yield only about 10 to 15% usable wood for model airplanes. Eighty five percent of the log must be put into the industrial grade. Without this amount being used by industries other

than model people, the price of balsa wood would be prohibitive.

At the airport on Wednesday, we waited over an hour for our pilot to arrive in a Piper Cherokee. I wasn't sure it could handle all the weight, but the pilot and Sam, through translation, convinced me that we should go. The flight into the jungle was like a ride over a solid green carpet. You see nothing but banana and balsa wood trees. We landed at the airport, an oily strip just wide enough to get down and get off again. A banana plantation owner gave us a tour, showing us how bananas are processed for shipment to the United States.

During dinner Wednesday night at a motel, the only one for 300 to 400 miles in the middle of the jungle, Jean asked us if we would like to take a ride into the jungle to see the Colorado Indian medicine man perform the rites on a sick person. So Jean informed one of the boys that he would have to be sick and go through the ritual with the medicine man! I knew it was going to be wild for a light rain was beginning to fall. We drove out of town for about 11 miles then stopped by the roadside. Walking through hilly terrain, we started down into a valley 100 to 150 feet below. Steps were carved into the hillside.

By this time it was 11:00 p.m. and with only one flashlight getting dimmer by the minute. I heard a roar that indicated water was rushing by. When I asked one of the fellows how we proposed to get across this roaring torrent, he pointed to two logs, side-by-side, flatted on the top, approximately 10 to 15 feet above the water.

Before utter panic hit me, I started across, reaching the center before the logs started to vibrate like a tuning fork, as the second man started to cross behind me. I was ready to return home – right now! Still vibrating at the same frequency as the logs, we made our way up the other side of the hill to the medicine man's hut. After conferring with him and having to take a drink of his white lightning, he sent us back across the stream to his friend. The trip back across the logs was something to remember as I fell when I reached the other side. I was safe and almost dry.

It now was 12:15 and we had to wake up the medicine man and his family. This didn't set too well with them, but the sight of Jean's money brought a sparkle to his eye and he brought out his family from the hut. Inside the hut, which was approximately ten feet square, there was a small table in the far corner. Two candles and some wild looking feathers made into a duster lay on one corner of the table. Toward the front of the table were two bottles of a vile looking liquid and a wooden cup. Our boy, who pretended to be sick, was instructed to take off his shirt and relax as the medicine man rubbed his chest with the oily liquid.

Mumbling a few words in a chant like tone, he proceeded to beat the feather duster vigorously on the boy's chest and back. The medicine man then poured a brown looking liquid into the cup and gave it to the boy to drink. If anyone who was not sick drank out of this cup, he'd be sure to catch something when he left. It was like going back to the 16th century.

The following morning we drove further into the jungle on dirt roads. We visited a school built by two Catholic priests who process balsa wood, having constructed eight classrooms and a small church from the proceeds, right in the middle of the jungle.

After touring the different balsa areas, we drove back to Guayaquil on a new four-lane highway. Upon completion, this road will run from Quito, the capitol, to the port city of Guayaquil. Jacques had made arrangements for our flight to Quito on Tame Airlines. Quito, about 9,000 feet above sea level, is located on a mountaintop and must qualify for the title of Las Vegas of South America. Needless to say, a few hours on Saturday night were spent at the tables.

Sunday was spent going to the monument that shows where the equator is, taking pictures, and visiting the numerous tourist shops and old churches. Sam and I met a small Franciscan friar who gave us a tour of the oldest cathedral in Quito. Putting my 14-size foot in my mouth, as usual, I said I would like to go to the top of the bell tower to look out over the city. I thought we would climb the steps inside the cathedral, but the other two had different ideas. We started up the outside of the building and over the rooftops to wind up some 80 feet above the ground. I am at home behind the stick of a Schweitzer I-26 at 5,000 feet, but swaying in the breeze 80 feet above the ground is for the birds! After turning in my mountain climbing equipment, we boarded a jet for home.

I would like to express my gratitude to Balsa Ecuador Lumber Corp., Jacques, and Jean Kohn, and especially to Mr. Sam Grober who made this trip one of the highlights of my 24 years in the balsa wood business. Their patience and fortitude showing me around was a great benefit.

The following is a letter written by one of Frank's friends after his passing for this biography.

*Dixie Cutrone
1325 North Tropical Trail
Merritt Island, FL 32953*

May 31, 1999

*Mr. Norm Rosenstock
124 Granada Street
Royal Palm Beach, FL 33411*

Dear Norm,

I have so many wonderful memories of our good friend, but I tried to condense my thoughts into a few paragraphs, which you will find below. We have lost a great guy, and I am certain that he is now flying high and free, far above this earthly existence.

I first met Frank at a Toledo show over 35 years ago. As the years went by, we met at various shows around the country and became great friends.

I will never forget one night at the Circus Circus Hotel in Las Vegas, during a T.O.C. meet, Frank said, "Dix, lets see if we can break the bank."

As luck would have it, while playing a Dollar machine, we hit for \$500. Frank was confident that we were on our way. We were on our way all right, straight back to our rooms about an hour later, and some dollars lighter.

At the Toledo shows, Frank would host a huge party at the hotel on Friday and Saturday nights. He loved to play the ukulele and, with his best friend playing the banjo, he would sing old time songs long into the night. One song that he always loved was “Bye, Bye, Blackbird.” Man, he could get the place jumping!

I am sure that there are many wonderful stories about Frank that others will tell. I know that I, along with the rest of the modeling community, lost a truly great friend here on earth. But we really did not lose him, because he is up there with many, many great friends of modeling, watching as we enjoy every day in our sport of building and flying models.

Come on, Frank, just one more chorus, “Bye, Bye, Blackbird” I miss you, buddy.

Dixie

The following article ran in Hobby Merchandiser in July of 1999.

Frank Garcher: 1928 – 1999

Francis S. “Frank” Garcher died of heart failure on May 22. Co-owner and CEO of Midwest Products in Hobart, Indiana, Frank was a U.S. Army veteran of the Korean Conflict, and a member of St. Mary of the Lake Catholic Church and Catholic Charities. Frank was a member of several civic organizations, including the Hobart Industrial Foundation, Hobart Industrial Economic Development Corporation, Hobart YMCA, Optimists Club of the Dunes, Hobart Chamber of Commerce, Indiana Society of Chicago, Octave Chanute Aquatorium Society of Indiana and American Legion Post #279.

Frank is survived by his wife Rosemary; three children, Michael (Pat) Garcher of Valparaiso, Sue (Tom) Zimmerman of Hobart and Carol (Nick) Seibal of Indianapolis; three grandchildren, Laura Zimmerman and Ben and Alaina Seibal and one sister, Patricia Raihl of Arizona. Funeral services took place at the Rees Funeral Home in Hobart, proceeding to St. Mary of the Lake Catholic Church for a Mass of Christian Burial.

Frank Garcher had a lifelong passion for aviation and modeling. He was an avid cull-scale pilot and an instrumental member of the Experimental Aircraft Association and Education Foundation, the Young Eagles, the Radio Control Hobby Trade Association, Hobby Industry Association, Association of Crafts and Creative Industries, National Free Flight Society, Miniatures Industry Association of America, Model Railroad Industry Association, Academy of Model Aeronautics, International Miniature Aircraft Association, International Miniature Aircraft Championship, St. Rita of Cascia Alumni Association, Federal Aviation Administration, National Retail Hobby Stores Association and the Vintage Radio Control Society.

Frank's love for flying led to the creation of Midwest Products, an internationally recognized hobby enterprise. Sue Burney, Midwest's vice president, described Frank as an entrepreneur whose roots were firmly entrenched in model aviation.

"Frank's business caters to hobby enthusiasts, and includes balsa products for model airplanes, boats and railroad accessories," says Burney. "The key to his success was his great love for people." Burney says that the business will continue to operate. She likens Midwest Products to a "small dimensional lumber yard." Products made there are sold locally and exported to Europe, Asia, and South America.

"Frank was always a gentleman and always searching for new ideas. He would listen to anyone, anywhere, anytime. He was a true modeler – not always active on the flight line, but a great figure for the hobby industry. The man was one of a kind." – Ed Bojan, Du-Bro Products

"Frank always said that he wanted to go out with banjo music and they had it played at the chapel. I do not think there was a dry eye in the house. I met Frank in the late 40s. He was a very large man, flying a very small model airplane. He was a great guy and a great musician. We're all gonna miss him." – Joe Stanton, Stanton Hobbies

"Frank and I used to fly model airplane demonstrations at Sox Park in Chicago between the double-headers. There aren't many people left of the 'original bunch.' Sid's gone (Axelrod)... Carl (Goldberg)... Matty Sullivan... They all taught me so much. I hope things don't change too much without Frank. He was a great one for aviation education, promoting it through RCHTA, through his company and everywhere else he could. We're going to miss him." – Charlie Bauer, Four-Pi Models and former Top Flite Models engineer

"Mr. Garcher and I worked closely together for 29 years. Frank was a great guy. He taught me a lot about business and a lot about life. I consider myself very fortunate to have spent as much time with the man as I did." – Ed Rogala, director of product development, Midwest Products

"Frank was a wonderful guy, and one of the few people I knew who never spoke about how his business was going. Every time you talked to Frank it was, 'How can we make the industry grow?' Frank was truly dedicated to the overall success of the hobby industry. He did a lot of work on the RCHTA Board. Anytime there was something working to get kids involved. Frank was 'Johnny-on-the-spot,' raising funds, promoting programs and doing whatever was necessary to help make them succeed. He had a real interest. Hew as always doing things for other people, doing things to get kids involved – and he really liked to party! Someone just asked me if there was going to be a moment of silence for Frank Garcher, and I told him that nothing could be any less appropriate for Frank. Instead, you want to get a banjo player, play some Dixieland, and fly some airplanes. His son-in-law said it best at the funeral, 'Frank had three loves in his life right after his family – airplanes, music and people.' He was a great friend and a great friend of the industry. It's real tough to lose him." – Dave Brown, Dave Brown Products and AMA president

The following article was published in the October 1999 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

Frank Garcher Remembered

THE BIG STOOP is gone.

Frank Garcher, president of Midwest Products, model designer, and modeling industry leader, died May 22 following a heart attack. He was 71.

“I know that I, along with the rest of the modeling community, lost a truly great friend,” wrote longtime friend Dixie Cutrone.

“I’m really going to miss the Big Guy. What a loss to the modeling world,” said Larry Davidson, a former business colleague who is now a top competitor in Society of Antique Modelers (SAM) events.

“I got to know Frank when I was in the wholesale and retail hobby business. He always treated me with great respect, and it was a pleasure doing business with him.”

Born March 3, 1928 in Brier Hill PA, Garcher began working for Midwest Model Supply, then owned by Wally Simmers, as a teenager in 1940. After a break for military duty in the early 1950s, he returned to Midwest and eventually became its president.

Affectionately nicknamed after the old “Terry and the Pirates” character, Garcher was known to be a bit of a character himself.

“At the Toledo shows, Frank would host a huge party at the hotel on Friday and Saturday nights,” wrote Cutrone. “He loved to play the ukulele. With his best friend playing the banjo, he would sing old-time songs long into the night. Man, he could get the place jumpin’.”

“Frank was the ultimate modeler’s party animal,” wrote District VIII Associate Vice President Jim Simpson. “His easy manner and humble friendliness made him the man to be with (or near) in order to see all who were there.”

Cutrone recalled an evening with Garcher during a Tournament of Champions event that didn’t quite work out as planned:

“Frank said, ‘Dix, let’s see if we can break the bank.’ While playing a dollar machine, we hit for \$500. Frank was confident that we were on our way.

“We were on our way, all right- straight back to our rooms about an hour later, and some dollars lighter.”

Garcher’s legacy extends far beyond the party scene, however. Many individuals and companies

in the hobby industry were positively affected by him.

“Frank always said, ‘We have to grow the industry. If we grow the industry, everyone—including Midwest products—will benefit,’” said Sue Burney, Vice President and General Manager of Midwest.

“Over the years, Frank’s contributions to the hobby grew in importance,” wrote Radio Control Hobby Trade Association (RCHTA) president Ralph Warner.

“Although he was always visible, it was never a matter of self-promotion, but rather as a catalyst to get the rest of us involved.”

Garcher was involved in RCHTA’s formation and served as a Board Director since its incorporation in 1983.

“I have no idea how far and wide Frank’s generosity went,” said Simpson, “but I can tell you that Frank’s giving money saved many model business, trade show, contests big and small, special events, and even the AMA.”

“Frank’s generosity stated before he made money,” wrote Robert Klein. “Even in the early days, no one ever came away from his shop empty-handed.”

“He was generous to a fault,” said AMA Historian Norm Rosenstock. “And he was a real people-person.”

Sue Burney concurs:

“He loved people. He was very friendly—the friendliest person I ever met.”

Although Garcher’s passing leaves what Simpson refers to as “a gaping hole in our hearts and modeling lives,” the staff at Midwest pledges to carry on.

“We’d like to assure modelers and crafters everywhere that Midwest Products will continue to manufacture and create hobby and craft products for enjoyment by all,” said Denise Taylor, Director of Advertising.

Ed Rogala, Director of Product Development, indicated during a Grand Event conversation that while Garcher’s presence would be sorely missed, the company was striving to maintain day-to-day operations as efficiently as possible.

“We feel the greatest tribute to him will be maintaining the high professional standards Midwest Products represents and that he so strongly encouraged,” wrote Sue Burney in a letter to customers. “With the enthusiastic spirit of Frank Garcher in our hearts, and with the continuity provisions that are in place, we will continue business without interruption.

Garcher became an AMA Fellow in 1984; was elected to the AMA Hall of Fame in 1989; and was given a Keeper of the Flame award in 1998.

“What he did for model aviation can never be appreciated enough,” wrote Johnnie Smith.

“He will be sorely missed,” said District VIII Vice President Sandy Frank.

“I’m gonna miss him big-time,” wrote Simpson, “with the love only fliers feel.”

Garcher is survived by his wife, Rosemary; three children; three grandchildren, and one sister.



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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