



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of DONALD (DON) GODFREY



Modeler since 1946    Born February 4, 1936  
AMA #5165CD

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Written & Submitted by DG (12/2000); Transcribed by NR (6/2001); Edited & Formatted by SS (10/2002), Reformatted by JS (08/2009)

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## **Career:**

- First president of the International Miniature Aircraft Association (IMAA)
- Created the first safety inspection program for large scale models, used by the AMA to this day
- Obtained a firm endorsement from the FAA for the large scale movement
- Brought this giant scale movement into the AMA as a Special Interest Group (SIG)
- Due to his untiring efforts since 1980 on, he has given life to the giant scale movement
- As IMAA president, he very heavily endorsed AMA
- In 1982 he convinced the IMAA board of directors to donate \$1,000 to the AMA building fund

## **Honors:**

- 1998 AMA Pioneer Award
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Don Godfrey, born February 4, 1936, began modeling at age 10. He built and flew Free Flight until age 17. He entered many Free Flight contests with planes such as the Comet Zipper, Vagabond, etc. His first meet was in 1947 at Syracuse, New York where he won second place.

At age 17, music took over with Don taking up the saxophone, then getting into an Army Band at age 20 during the Korean conflict. While in the Army band in New York City, Don Godfrey studied with a fine teacher, then after discharge from the service, played the Ed Sullivan Show in New York City. Next, he traveled the U.S. with the Jerry Fielding Band, ending up in Las Vegas where he played for Frank Sinatra for several years.

In 1959, Don came home from Las Vegas and entered the retail music business with his dad, Bill. Don got married on October 2, 1966, and had two children – both daughters. Don got back into the airplane hobby in 1970 by building a Proctor Antic kit and using a Pro-Line radio system. Don got hooked very heavily and became very active in Radio Controlled (RC) and AMA events.

In 1976, Don designed the first (giant scale) Stearman biplane by doubling plans from a Sterling Stearman kit, creating a 96-inch wingspan and using a Quadra 35cc engine that was available from Canada. Don began corresponding with other modelers around the U.S. and Canada who had a very big interest in building and flying very big RC models.

Lo and behold, in 1980, on April 10, at Toledo, Ohio, Don Godfrey was asked to head a new organization dedicated to the building of large RC aircraft, and he did so. The new organization became known as the International Miniature Aircraft Association, Inc. (IMAA). This new organization grew like wildfire in the U.S. and other countries in Europe and Canada.

Don Godfrey wrote articles for Model Airplane News magazine (Giant Steps) from 1981 to 1985 as well as being a contributor on the subject of scale RC aircraft in various leading RC publications. As a pioneer of giant scale modeling, he designed the first huge B-25 Mitchell bomber, with a 148-inch span and using two Kioritz 2.3 C.I. gas engines. The B-25 was demonstrated at events for nine years until it met its demise in 1992 due to radio failure.

Don Godfrey's first club was the Binghamton Balsa Bugs (1947) in Binghamton, New York. Later the club name was changed to the Binghamton Aeros. Don formed the new Binghamton Aeros in 1983, a club dedicated to giant scale RC planes with the IMAA and AMA sanction. And then in 1990, he formed a new giant scale club by the name of the Giant Scale Aircraft Association – IMAA chapter #400, AMA #3138.

As a contest director and leader administer in AMA, Don has put on many AMA-sanctioned events annually since 1983. He has been a newsletter editor annually since 1983, also had a hobby business called Don Godfrey's Hobbies from 1983 to present. Don also continues to teach the art of flying RC model aircraft.

In summary, Don Godfrey has been involved in model airplanes for over 50 years and continues to be a driving force in the modeling hobby. Don has been a strong supporter of AMA and IMAA; he designed the experimental plan that created a new envelope for extra large models to fly – models that weigh from 55 to 100 pounds. Don set up a chapter network for IMAA that covered 14 countries all over the world. He set up the guidelines for giant scale events, AMA- and IMAA-sanctioned. He also instigated the first safety inspection program that became mandatory at all IMAA-sanctioned events as well as most AMA-sanctioned events.

Godfrey obtained a firm endorsement from the FAA to proceed with the advancement of large RC model aircraft. The AMA recognized that IMAA was an innovative leader in giant scale aircraft progress and as such, AMA designated IMAA as a special interest group within the AMA structure.

During the formidable years of IMAA, Godfrey traveled the U.S. setting up IMAA festival sites (event now called, Rally of Giants) at various locations such as Louisville, Kentucky; Van Nuys, California; Austin, Texas Oshkosh, Wisconsin; Lansing, Michigan and many other locations.

Since 1980, Don Godfrey has taught literally hundreds of people to fly RC aircraft and, to this day, still teaches young and old alike to fly and to enjoy this wonderful sport/hobby. In 1998, AMA awarded Don Godfrey the prestigious Pioneer Award at Muncie, Indiana.

In summary, Godfrey has done it all – from building Free Flight models as a child, to building and flying huge RC aircraft, has formed three new AMA/IMAA clubs, has secured many good flying sites, has worked closely with AMA to keep the RC hobby the safest, most fun sport in the world. He has written many articles for leading RC magazines, has been a newsletter editor since 1975, completed a 148-inch span B-26 bomber, has seven giant scale model aircraft in his

basement “hangar” and still flies a 60-size Kaos (by Joe Bridi) for practice and acrobatic technique.

If it were not for the undying effort of Don Godfrey in the early 1980s, the building and flying of large RC aircraft would not have become a possibility. Everywhere you look, at every event being held anywhere in the U.S., you will find big, beautiful RC aircraft with wingspans up to 20 feet, experimental models that weigh up to 100 pounds – some of the most beautiful aircraft being built and flown in the world.

Although still heavily involved with RC model aircraft, Godfrey still performs as a professional musician, playing with a 17-piece dance band and he also has his own combo that performs quality music at wedding receptions and parties and banquets. Godfrey also has his own musical instrument repair service, for he apprenticed the art of repairing musical instruments for four years from age 13 to age 17.

As a contest director, leader/administer of AMA, Godfrey promoted events draw hundreds and often thousands of spectators. In this way, we keep our hobby alive and interesting to the general public and, more important, to the young people that are coming up and getting interested in the art of RC model flying. Proper promotion is the key to successful events and successful growth of any organization. In this respect, Godfrey has succeeded.

*(signed) Donald Godfrey  
December 23, 2000*

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**AMA History Project**  
National Model Aviation Museum  
5151 E. Memorial Dr.  
Muncie IN 47302  
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511  
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

