



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of MIKE GRETZ January 26, 1952 – January 15, 2016



Written by Model Aviation Staff (01/2008); Transcribed by JS (02/2008), Reformatted by JS (08/2009); Updated by JS (01/2016, 03/2016)

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## **Mike Gretz** Montezuma, Iowa

Mike Gretz was born January 26, 1952 in Mankato, Minnesota. He got his start in model aviation building balsa gliders and rubber-powered stick models made by American Junior and North Pacific. He thoroughly studied the instructions and experimented with bending the control surfaces. His little modifications enabled his airplanes to fly much better than those his friends built.

Mike's first experience with gas-powered models was observing his uncles, who flew Free Flight and Control Line models. Still a boy at the time, Mike's teenage uncles would not let him play with their previous pieces of work. He instead watched them build and fly. When his family relocated to Waterloo, Iowa in 1960, Mike spent time watching Control Line pilots fly their models in the park a block from his house.

In 1968, Mike purchased his first gas model: a Sterling *Ringmaster* 1/2A Control Line model with a Cox Babe Bee .049 engine. He assembled the model with his younger brother's assistance. In exchange for his help, Mike had to let his brother fly it. The brothers taught themselves how to run the engine and fly the aircraft in only a few days.

His family moved back to Mankato in 1969, where Mike became acquainted with Michael Stott and his father, Arnold, operator of the local hobby shop. Arnold saw his attraction to model airplanes and became his mentor. Mike credits Arnold with showing him that model aircraft could be more than just a hobby.

Mike entered his first contest at age 18. He placed first at the 1970 Mankato Modelers AAA-rated Control Line contest in the Senior Stunt category, flying a hybrid airplane consisting of a salvaged Sid Chipmunk wing and a profile fuselage of his own design.

Mike participated in numerous contests after his first win in Mankato and in 1974, after only six years in the hobby, he competed in his first World Championships, placing fourth overall.

Mike has been a seven-time United States team member as well as the team manager in FAI World Championships competition. He received AMA's FAI Distinguished Performance Award for multiple Scale World Championships and the FAI Scale World Championships honored him with distinguished performance awards in 1976, 1984, 1986, and 1988.

He is the only person to win first place at the AMA Nats in Control Line Scale *and* Radio Control Scale. Mike has been awarded the High Flight Points Award as well as the National Association of Scale Aeromodelers' Flight Achievement Award a number of times in Scale

competition. He has received achievement awards and high static score awards on multiple occasions.

Sig Manufacturing hired Mike in January of 1972 at its headquarters in Montezuma, Iowa. His responsibilities extended throughout various departments of the organization. His job titles ranged from product engineer to advertising director.

At Sig, Mike was responsible for product design, systems engineering, quality control, and sales and product support. He has designed and brought to market dozens of Sig models and other related products, including Sig's first ARF.

Mike was the leader of Sig's engineering and production departments while the company made the transition into the computer age. With his assistance and inspiration, Sig became the first major manufacturer in the industry to produce laser-cut model airplane kits.

Aside from model construction, Mike has a strong talent for writing and photography. He has been published in MA several times, covering Nats Radio Control Scale. Other articles, photographs, and models have run in *Model Airplane News*, *Scale R/C Modeler*, *Hobby Merchandiser*, and *R/C Report*.

In 1997, Mike teamed with Shawn Elliot of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) and co-founded the KidVenture program, which introduces youth to model airplanes.

Initially the program allowed participants to experience flight using gas-powered Control Line models. It has grown throughout the years to incorporate building and flying a Free Flight model, demonstrations of Radio Control park flyers, model rockets, flight simulators, and many other aviation-oriented activities for kids.

Every year, approximately 2,000 kids attend KidVenture to experience the thrill of model aviation.

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*The following information was published in the April 2016 issue of Model Aviation magazine after Mike's passing.*

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## **Mike David Gretz 1952-2016**

A man known for bringing Sig Manufacturing into the modern age of laser-cut kits and ARFs has passed away.

Mike Gretz, lead designer for Sig Manufacturing, was also a modeler, world champion, and AMA Model Aviation Hall of Fame member. He had worked for Sig Manufacturing since January of 1972.

Mike purchased his first gas-powered model in 1968, and entered his first Control Line (CL) contest at age 18. Six years after taking up the hobby, he competed in his first World

Championship and finished fourth. Mike continued to compete and went on to become a seven-time Team USA member, as well as a FAI World Championship team manager. He also competed in the RC Scale Nats.

Perhaps best known for his work at Sig Manufacturing, Mike was responsible for product design, systems engineering, quality control, sales, and product support. He designed dozens of models including the company's first ARF, and helped Sig Manufacturing transition into the computer age to become the first major manufacturer to produce laser-cut model aircraft kits. He often attended fly-ins and other aeromodeling gatherings.

His articles and photographs about model aircraft appeared in *Model Aviation*, *Model Airplane News*, *Scale R/C Modeler*, *Hobby Merchandiser*, and *R/C Report*. He was the "CL Scale" columnist for *Model Aviation* from January 1978 to January 1981, and provided CL Scale Nats coverage for the magazine.

In addition to designing and writing, Mike served as the longtime president of the AirPower Museum, located in Ottumwa, Iowa, and was the chairman of AMA's RC Scale Contest Board. In cooperation with the EAA, he launched the KidVenture program at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh, in 1997.

His honors include receiving the AMA's FAI Distinguished Performance Award; a distinguished performance award at the FAI Scale World Championships in 1976, 1984, 1986, and 1988; the High Point Award; and several National Association of Scale Aeromodelers Flight Achievement Awards. Mike was inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 2007, received an AMA Fellowship Award in 2010, and was honored with the Distinguished Service Award in January 2016, the day before his death.

Mike is survived by his wife, Doris, of Montezuma, Iowa; a son, Dave; four sisters, two brothers, and several grandchildren. A crowdfunding campaign has been established to help with medical expenses. Donations can be made at [www.youcaring.com/mike-and-doris-gretz-505330](http://www.youcaring.com/mike-and-doris-gretz-505330).

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