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# The AMA History Project Presents: History of the GREATER DETROIT SOARING AND HIKING SOCIETY



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Written by B. Manning and other club members; Reformatted and edited by JS (09/2014)

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*This document or story will be presented in a couple of steps. The first will be a well written summary of the club by Bud Manning, one of the clubs founders. Bud's history includes a lot of the items AMA asked for in their writing guide. The history concerns the very early formation of the club and some details until the 1980 time frame when Bud became less active for personal reasons. [Jack Lafret] did a little editing of Bud's document only for grammatical reasons, none of the content has been changed.*

*The time from the early eighties to the present will be outlined in more of an outline format with a limited number of items that are relevant to the clubs development and history. Jack Lafret will put this portion of the document together with help of the existing club members.*

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## **Part I: Greater Detroit Soaring and Hiking Society A Brief History By Bud Manning**

In the late sixties brothers, Earl and Bud Pell started experimenting with radio controlled gliders. First using single channel radios, and then moving to multi-channel proportional units.

It wasn't long before they had attracted a small group of enthusiasts who gathered on Sunday mornings at a large field near an old Nike site in Southfield Michigan.

Among that group in the spring of 1969 were Earl Pell, Bud Pell, Bob Belger, Fred Butler, Ed Allman, Ray Vanderdonck and Bud Manning.

At the start the gliders were launched with a bungee hi-start. By the fall of 1969 an electric winch was being used. Not knowing about the use of a turn around, the winch was some eight or nine hundred feet out in the field with the winch operator. Launching was accomplished with the aid of a series of hand signals like those used in launching full size gliders.

The group grew in size and someone decided it should have a name. The non-club was born. The flyers were inexperienced and what with hiking to retrieve gliders and shagging tow lines the hiking aspect of the sport was incorporated into the name. "***The Greater Detroit Soaring and Hiking Society***".

The non-club had developed into a club. Earl Pell was the first president with Bud Pell vice president and Bud Manning secretary.

RC Soaring appeared in other areas in Michigan and in July 1970 the first Michigan State RC Soaring Championships were held in Jackson. Jack Josaitis flying a Graupner Cirrus became the first state soaring champion.

In August 1970 the late Werner Kohl invited the club to fly at a field on state land in Plymouth. That field was used until the summer of 1975.

Art Slagle produced a winch powered by a gasoline engine in December 1970. It did not work to well and the project was abandoned in favor of the electric winch, which by now was used with a turnaround pulley so that the pilot could launch his own sailplane.

1971 marked some important firsts for greater Detroit. In February the first Sno-Fly was held. Who over heard of flying sailplanes in the middle of winter? Well enough entries showed up to make a good content including a group from SOAR in Chicago. The day started with four degree temperature. Two rounds of duration and one round of speed were flown. The Sno-fly has become the oldest continuously held RC content in Michigan.

The first RC glider event as part of the Michigan Exchange Club's Model Airplane Championships was held on June 13, 1971. State champion, Jack Josaitis was contest director. Greater Detroit has conducted this event every year to date. Josaitis was followed as contest director by Earl Pell, Dave Corven and Pat Flinn. For the last several years the sailplane pilots have been joined by the RC assisted Old Time Free-flyers.

The club started a series of monthly club contests in September 1971 that continue to this day. The purpose of these contests is to give members experience in flying in competition.

A new flying site was found in Troy in May of 1972. This field was used along with the Plymouth field until it was abandoned in 1975. The club still uses the Troy field. Greater Detroit did not invent the dual meet but was quick to pick up on the idea. September 16 and 17 1972 were the dates of the first East Coast Soaring Society Dual Meet in Michigan. Greater Detroit sponsored one day and SOAR the other. The dual meet concept has become an annual event. In recent years it has been held under Great lakes Soaring League rules and cosponsored with MRCS.

Every two years the League of Silent Flight Regional Tournaments are held. The Greater Detroit Soaring and Hiking society has run this event for District V11 every two years since 1978, and has had the largest turn out of any LSF Regional event every time.

The Greater Detroit Soaring and Hiking Society has AMA Charter number 357. In 1973 the officers and membership decided it was time to incorporate. This was accomplished in June 1973.

The club has never been afraid to try new things experimenting with the Flying Finish in 1973, the speed triangle in 1973 and more recently the line retrievers which they were the first to use in this area. Fred Schaffle has been responsible for most of the club's

retriever development.

Club members have competed in every SOAR Nats and every Great Race. The Greater Detroit team of Jeff Mrlik, Warren Tiahrt, Jerry Mrlik, Dave Corven, Erich Kugler and Dale Martell placed first in 1976 in "The Great Bicentennial R/C Sailplane Race". Pat Flynn led teams variously composed of Mary Flinn, Bob and Barb Robinson, Dale and Bev Martell, Noal and Claire Rossow, and Erich Kugler to Great Race victories in 1979, 1980 and 1981.

GDS&HS has been active in promoting RC soaring. In 1981 and 1982, a group of members presented programs on RC Soaring to area RC pattern, indoor, free flight and control line clubs.

Members displayed models and equipment and explained RC soaring to visitors to the Cranbrook "Up with Science" show in the spring of 1985.

The club has published and distributed an information and fact sheet on "What Is an R/C Sailplane."

Several members have made available computer generated airfoil plots.

Greater Detroit is proud of a number of members and former members who have made notable achievements. Ed Allman, designer of the club logo, Bob Belger who created the Super Cirrus and Pat Flinn who has lead several teams to great race wins.

Otto Heithecker placed third in the World Championships at Doylestown Pa. in 1971. He was ECCS champion in 1972, 1973 and 1974.

Placed third at the SOAR Nats in 1971, 1972, 1973 and was National Champion in 1974.

The late Kenneth Held, AMA president in 1951.

Jack Josaitis. Co-owner of Detroit area hobby shops was AMA District V.P. from 1967 to 1975. He was Michigan State Soaring Champion three times.

Jerry Mrlik's first contest was the 1972 SOAR Nats where he flew his 14-foot Stratus, forerunner of all famous Astro-Jeff. The balsa fuselage of the Stratus served to make the mold for the Astro-Jeff, which was first flown in the spring of 1975.

Jeff Mrlik, Jerry's son, made his first solo flight on Jerry's Stratus early in 1973. At the age of twelve he was National Champion at the 1973 SOAR Nats flying the Astro-Jeff. Ray Vanderdonck was the "SOAR Nats Champion" in 1972, flying a Nimbus.

National model magazines have published some of our members. Otto Heithecker's Snoopy and Challenger plans were published as was Jerry Mrlik's Astor-Jeff. Articles by Pat Flinn and Ray DiNoble have appeared in print.

The club can boast a number of successful junior members, Jeff Mrlik, Jason Josaitis, Eric Tiahrt, Chris Corven, Kurt Gaiser, Chris Roberts and Steve Ekizian.

LSF members among the first 100 are Earl Pell, Bud Pell, Art Slagle, Bud Manning, and Steve Ekizian.

Members and former members who have achieved LSF Level V are Ken Bates, Pat Flinn, Otto Heithecker, John Hoover, John Humphries and Don Patterson.

Bud Pell, Earl Pell, Otto Heithecker, Art Slagle Bob Williams and Bud Manning became interested in full size sailplanes and obtained their pilots licenses as a result of flying RC sailplanes.

Many of the original group has gone on to do other things only to be followed by new enthusiasts who carry on the old traditions.

My thanks to Ray DiNoble, Pat Flinn, Otto Heithecker, Jack Josaitis and Jerry Mrlik for the information they supplied.

-Bud Manning

**Part II:**  
**Club Evolution from the 1980s to 2013**  
**By Jack Iafret**

Since Bud's early history ends in the early eighties and the club has gone through a development process that all technology oriented organizations must go through to survive and continue to exist. The items cataloged here are an effort to fill in the blanks as outlined in the AMA request for club histories:

- Flying Fields:
  - During the 80s we flew at the corner of Crooks road and 18 Mile Rd in Troy Michigan. This field was lost to population growth in the late 80s.
  - For three or four years the club had no field and was held together by a few diehard members that gathered in open fields to meet and fun fly.

The contest group did most of their flying at away contests during this time. Bob Dukert, Wilber Hutchings, Mike Wade, Jack Iafret, Art Slagle and Dave Corven and a few others seemed to be the core group during this period.

- 'Hutch' found us a field with the Oakland County Parks department at Springfield Oaks, it was barely adequate for sport flying and we could not have a major contest at this location but it was a field and a club without a field is on its way to extinction.

We flew there for two or three years before the 4H club kind of forced us out but Hutch kept in contact with the Oakland County Parks and eventually they said to look around and see if one of the other facilities would work.

- Dave Corven and Jack Iafret scouted the Addison Oaks Park which is part of the Oakland County Parks department and found a field in the back of the large park that was being used for hay by a local farmer. It was not a great field because of a tree line running down the middle of the 80 acres. Thankfully the Parks Department felt that we could use the land and for six years or so kept improving the facility for us until it is now a good club field. We cannot hold a major sailplane contest there but it is fine for club and league work. The best thing is the Park provides all the maintenance and provides us power and sanitary facilities as part of the entry fee.
- Club Makeup and Societal Changes:
  - The club has evolved from being a purely competitive sailplane group to mixed bag of sailplane competitors, sport sailplane flyers and sport electric flyers.
  - Competition Electric powered soaring (ALES) is rapidly taking over the winch launch soaring activities because of the convenience of not needing winch operators and setting up and tearing down winch equipment.
  - Because of the addition of electric sport and electric sailplane and a group of DLG (Discus Launched Gliders) pilots, the membership has grown to around 50 and has remained constant for the last several years.
  - Because the competition side of the club got old I am afraid the Sno-Fly had its last fling several years ago but did manage to put in 34 consecutive years of flying in all kinds of weather. Dave Corven and Art Slagle CD-ed the event for many years then Jack Iafret took over and ran it for the last several years. We could not hold the event at our field because if there was snow on the ground you could not get back to our field unless you used a snow mobile.

For this reason the event was moved to the Toledo Weak Signals field because they could and did keep it useable all year. It became tough to get help to move our winches and launch equipment the 80 miles south then cart it back home to our shed at the Addison field so the contest was cancelled with much pain and agony.
  - The last six years has been good for those of us that live in snow country because the club is now very active flying indoors rather than building for next summer. The club is very fortunate that the technology boom in models with foamies, helis, and modern electronics has come of age.

We now have two facilities to use each week during the winter and one of them the “Ultimate Soccer Arena” is just fantastic. A full sized soccer field within a 75 foot high metal building that includes a 40 foot runoff all the way around the playing field. It is really big with great temperature control and a dining facility.

The second facility is half the size and has about a 30 foot ceiling but if you can handle it, it makes for improving your 3D skills.

So the sailplane only club has morphed into a sailplane club that also flies indoor 3D, helis, and sport electrics.

- The club still is primarily a sailplane club and that activity takes president over any other type of aircraft at the field. When the sailplanes are done, the sport planes and helis come out of the cars and vans for their chance to take to the air.

## **Membership**

As I write this most of the founding members are either doing something else, or have passed away to the big thermal in the sky. If I am not mistaken, Bob Belger is the only active remaining original member. Bud Manning is around and a member but not active. Dave Corven is not a founding member but is very close as he joined the club about a year after its formation and Dave is still very active today. Dave flies in contests including the Nats, Masters and local League and Club events. At this time has designed and is almost done with the build of a four meter contest sailplane called the “Stingray” after his beloved Corvette.

The club is open to all who are interested in sailplanes both winch and electric launched versions, power flyers would be accepted into the club but they cannot fly a power ship at our field as we have agreements with the park to keep peace and quiet for those who are camping, biking, hiking etc. that the park is noted for.

## **Club Members Activities for AMA**

- In the 90s our club was an integral part of the National Soaring Championships for many years. This responsibility was a result of being in a leadership role of the League of Silent Flight, the Soaring SIG. The LSF put on its own Soaring Nationals for several years before joining forces with the AMA to hold what is now the AMA/LSF Soaring Nats.

Dave Corven and Jack Iafret of the GDSHS were officers of the LSF and along with Mike Stump and Cal Posthuma, also from Michigan, were responsible for merging the LSF Soaring Nationals with the AMA Soaring Nationals. Mike headed up the negotiations with AMA but the four of officers all had a hand in the

formation of one of the best soaring contests in the country.

- Dave Corven is a prior Nats Event Director and in the late 90s and early 2000s Wilbert Hutchings and Jack Iafret were CDs for many of the Nats Soaring events.
- Jack Iafret was totally responsible for establishing the Nostalgia sailplane event by writing the preliminary rules in 1994, then running test contests and unofficial Nats events for several years before writing the final rules making proposal that added event number 461 to the rules book.
- A longtime supporter of both winch and electric launched soaring, Jack has been active in the political arena of the LSF and was the lead in merger of the NSS (the past Soaring SIG) with the LSF. More recently helping Tom Kallevang of Chicago and Mike McGowan of Georgia in the merger of the Electric SIG into the LSF.
- In 2012 Jack was part of the five member team that developed the rules set for the ALES event that is now a provisional AMA event and will be flown for the third year at the AMA Nats.

This last effort is ending up with the Nats including ALES into the normal soaring schedule and making it a soaring event rather than an electric event.

- Dave Corven has been a CD for the Team Select for F3B and will be involved again in 2013 in the Team Selection process that will take place at the Muncie site.

## **Contests**

As Bud stated in his summary, the club participated in contest work since its inception and that tradition still continues but to a lesser degree than a few years ago.

- We have monthly soaring contests from May through December and are now experimenting with allowing ALES planes to compete directly with Winch Launched planes to improve participation. The usual end-of-the-year awards take place for the yearly winners in several classes.
- Roger Van Elslander is leading the charge for a group of DLG enthusiast and CDs a contest monthly during the summer.

Roger also holds a major DLG contest each year as a benefit for the “Toys for Tots” where each contestant donates a toy or money as the entry fee.

- The club is a member of the MSL (Michigan Soaring League) and holds a major “League Contest” each year as part of that group.

- In 2012 we had our first major ALES contest but the weather all but destroyed the turnout, hopefully the two day 2013 contest will have better weather.

## **Publications**

In the past we have had a newsletter with Wilbert Hutchings as the editor but since the advent of the internet and electronic forums that activity has dissolved with time. We do have a fairly active web site at [www.gdshs.org](http://www.gdshs.org) that contains all the information that someone looking for a soaring club would need.

## **Historical Presidents**

- Ray Milio, the present president
- Joe Schnur
- Ken Rogus
- Jack Iafret
- Mike Wade
- Dave Corven
- Warren Tiaht
- Bob Williams
- Earl Pell, the first president

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