

Flying farmers soar on to fellowship and friendship

BY LAURA ENGLAND

MARIETTA — If you ask a Pennsylvania Flying Farmer member to name one reason why you should join the organization, you would probably get four reasons instead — flying, fellowship, friends and food.

The four F's of the Flying Farmers, as they're called by members, serve as a solid backbone for the organization. It's a shared love of flying that brings the group together. Then, the fellowship swarms in and generates a lasting bond of friendship. And the food is just one way of saying, "Hi. It's great to see you!"

The Pa. Flying Farmers chapter is one of 41 chapters in the United States, Canada and Mexico that is part of the International Flying Farmers (IFF) organization. The Pennsylvania chapter is a member of Region I, along with the Delmarva, Maryland, New Jersey and Virginia chapters. IFF chapters are self-sustaining and self governing, and chapter delegates in turn elect International officers during annual conventions.

The IFF, which boasts 9000 members, was born 39 years ago under the direction of the late Henry G. Bennett. Then president of the Oklahoma State University, Bennett and associates decided an organization of "flying" farmers had great possibilities.

And the possibilities of the

organization have been great.

According to the IFF Silhouette, individual chapters foster abiding friendships by sponsoring local and regional fly-ins. Some chapters have community betterment programs. Other FF'ers fly missions of mercy and help in air searches.

What spurs this involvement is the atmosphere among chapter members. "It's a family organization," explains state president R. Keith Vogt. "There is tremendous friendship and love among the group."

Vogt, who recently hosted a regional fly-in at his farm in Marietta, says Flying Farmers brings together people interested in both agriculture and aviation. When planning a meeting, Vogt says he likes to provide a meaningful program, education, safety aspects and areas of interest in both flying and farming.

Even with well-planned programs, FF'ers are quick to point out that the four F's — the flying, fellowship, friendship and food — are really the important aspects of the fly-ins.

Pa. chapter member Nancy Marsteller, New Park, a former state and international Flying Farmers Queen, points out the bond of aviation and agriculture as "something we, as members, all share."

Mrs. Marsteller speaks highly of the organization as she explains her role as the International



Fellowship is an important aspect of the Pa. Flying Farmers. Here, the group gathers at the R. Keith Vogt residence, Marietta, for its September meeting. (Photo by Dave Kruger).

Queen. During her reign, she traveled over 4000 miles to state conventions to promote Flying Farmers, crown state queens, and help honor those members who received their Landit Awards.

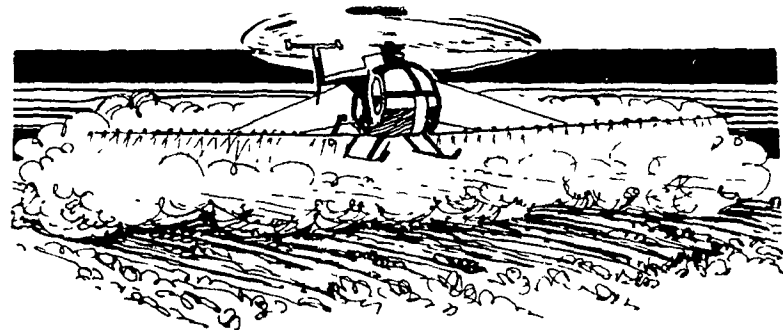
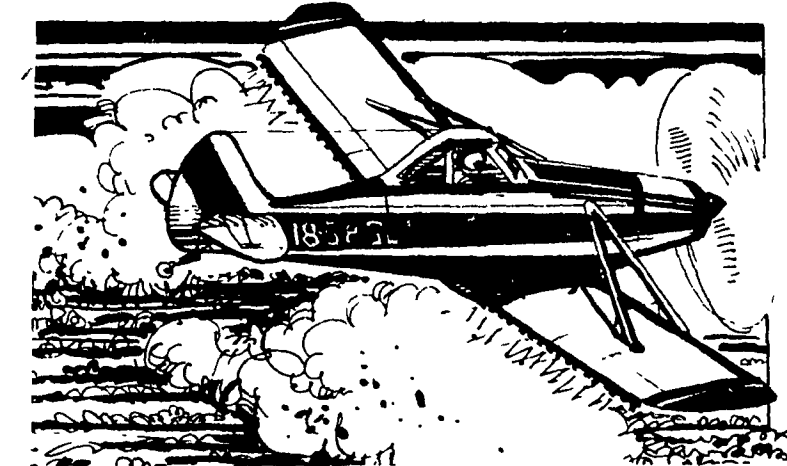
The Landit program is important, Mrs. Marsteller says, as it encourages female members, who do not have a flying license, to learn how to land a plane. This ability is essential if a problem in the air should ever occur. Although she doesn't have her license, Mrs. Marsteller does have her Landit certificate. She says she would eventually like to get her license, but until then her husband, Wilbur, is the pilot in the family.

The interest in flying is shared equally by the Marsteller's two children, Darren, 13, and Laura, 10, who are members of the youth organization.

"They (Darren and Laura) know people all over the United States and Canada," Mrs. Marsteller says, "and when the national convention rolls around they claim they have to go just to see their friends."

Joining the organization in the teen years has its benefits, and Jeff Rothenberger, Oxford, can attest to that. Rothenberger's interest in flying began when he attended an IFF convention in Florida with his parents. That was in 1965, and in 1972 when he was 17 he took up flying himself.

Rothenberger, a part-time farmer and an elementary teacher at Solanco in Lancaster County, now owns his own plane — a Cessna single engine, four-place. He also has his VFR (visual flight rules)



license which allows him to fly into clouds, relying on instrumentation only.

Since getting his license, Rothenberger, who was the IFF teen vice president in 1976, says he has about 720 hours of flying time.

In giving his opinion of the Flying Farmers, Rothenberger has this to say, "It's a lot of fun and there are many social things to do. Basically, we have a good time."

Having a good time and building many friendships are not the only things Velda Beidler, Barto, has achieved through her membership in the Flying Farmers.

Mrs. Beidler, who has her pilots license, has received awards, designed to encourage flying, from the IFF. She began by receiving her Landit certificate and then moved on to a plaque for soloing. She then received a trophy from Piper Aircraft for earning her private pilot's license.

Both Mrs. Beidler and her husband, Gordon, have their licenses and take turns when flying. The couple has made several trips to Ohio where Mrs. Beidler's parents live, and have on occasion taken friends to Raleigh, N.C.

Mrs. Beidler has her VFR license and remembers one special trip when flying through the clouds.

"We were flying north of Washington," she says, "and were going through the clouds. When we broke out (of the clouds) we saw a circular rainbow. It was beautiful."

"It was really a beautiful flight, and you can really see God's country from the air."

Another "beautiful" aspect about flying is that it is for young and old alike. At age 14, a person is able to solo. At 17, a teen can get a private pilot license and is able to haul passengers. And when you get a little older the benefits are ... well, just ask 77-year-old Horace Pepper.

Pepper, a member of the Delmarva chapter got his license in 1946 when he was 40 and has a little less than 4000 hours of flying time. He has his own plane, a Cessna 182 four-place, and a landing strip and hanger on his farm in Laurel, Del.

Pepper and his wife, Harriet, enjoy the Flying Farmers organization very much and the many friends they have made. And the actual flying? Harriet says, "I like it fine."

And just how long does Pepper plan to continue flying?

"As long as I can pass my physical and the sheriff doesn't catch me," he says jokingly, "I'll keep flying."



President R. Keith Vogt, right, explains that having a good time is not the only purpose behind the Flying Farmers — education is also highly regarded. At this meeting, members got to see some equipment from E.E. Shenk and Sons, R3 Elizabethtown. (Photo by Dave Kruger).



Getting caught in traffic while trying to get to a meeting is no problem for Pa. Flying Farmers members. A landing strip at a local airport or one in a farmer's field proves adequate for landing a plane. (Photo by Dave Kruger, Pa. Flying Farmer member).