

How To Survive As A Chapter

EDITOR'S NOTE:—The EAA Chapter is the backbone of our organization and offers a closeness and good fellowship from which great accomplishments can be made. This guest editorial, we are sure, will in various areas ring true. How well you, the member of a chapter, react to your group's affairs can mean success or failure. This guest editorial is true. Is your chapter next?

ONLY RECENTLY, WHAT could have become one of the best EAA chapters died a rather untimely and unjustified death. In order to see why this chapter relinquished its charter, let us study its assets and some of the steps which could have been taken for it to survive. Let's see what can be done in the future to keep all chapters functioning in spite of problems created by personality clashes, poor geographical location, indifference among the members, and all the many other obstacles which nearly all new organizations must hurdle.

Chapter "X" really existed. It was in an area served by at least six small flight strips and one large county-owned airport complete with control tower, ILS, landing lights, OMNI, three 5,000 ft. hard surface runways, Unicom, FAA approved repair station . . . you name it . . . they had it! The area served by the chapter was rather wealthy with a total population of between 200 and 300 thousand. Private or sport flying was at a very low level when considering the huge number of people who were or could become sold on flying. There was only one flying club, and it was a halfhearted outfit which only contacted and helped a few people. There were very few low rent aircraft, and flying lessons could be had at reasonable rates only to college students. The area's aviation potential was tremendous, and Chapter "X" really was in pay dirt.

The chapter began rather slowly as most chapters do. Its organization can be blamed on the untiring, selfless efforts of one EAAer, although there were a few members in the area prior to the chapter's birth. He personally contacted all those attending an aviation school in an effort to recruit members and contacted the aviation enthusiasts in the immediate area. Naturally, he became our first president. First off, we drew up a rough draft of our chapter charter and by-laws during committee meetings and later refined and accepted these items during a regular chapter meeting. Early during the outfit's organization, we learned of each individual's talents and abilities. This knowledge helped us to elect officers and committee chairmen. For example, it was learned that one fellow was good at keeping notes during chapter and committee meetings, so he became the chapter's first secretary-treasurer.

The chapter obtained privileges which would make any chapter turn green with envy. Use of a repair station's facilities as well as the facilities of the aviation school were good starters in the list of the chapter's acquisitions. Skilled aircraft mechanics at the repair station were available to help the members with structural and design problems, at no cost to the members. Among the members, there was an ATR pilot who had flown everything from Goodyear racers to the DC-8, two A&P instructors, three flight instructors, three A&Ps, three

A&P students, several commercial pilots with thousands of hours in multi-engine aircraft, and a host of skills which would be of value to the chapter. In spite of all these assets, attendance at meetings and interest in the chapter deteriorated until there simply was no organization.

Lack of sufficient interest and cooperation has spelled the doom of many fine organizations. It requires skill and talent of a few to maintain the proper level of interest and cooperation. Chapter "X" drifted along for quite a spell carrying members who had not paid their initiation fees and dues. This situation should not be allowed to occur, and it's best to take aside each delinquent member and try to politely persuade him to pay up soon, or else. No club can afford to carry those who can't meet their financial obligations. Without adequate funds, no chapter can function properly, and it must have the necessary cash so as to operate in the best interest of each and every member and the community which it looks to for support. Not only does a chapter fail to serve its members when it ceases to function properly, it betrays outsiders who have given it help.

While the EAA doesn't consider itself to be a civic group, in many ways it is. To think that the EAA serves only those interested in building a particular type aircraft is gross stupidity. It serves aviation and all those interested in or active in aviation. It can serve a community nearly as well if not better than many civic organizations. It can get teen-agers off the streets and into the typical basement or garage aircraft shop. It can provide outlets for the energies of those who love aircraft. It can inspire greatness and help creativity of the genius variety.

Organizing an EAA chapter is a serious matter, and members who persist in being dead wood should be requested to return to the taverns, pool halls, and street corners from whence they came. A person doesn't have to build an airplane, and much less fly one, to be a fine active supporter of the chapter and the EAA at large.

The members' interest in the chapter must be preserved during all periods of the chapter's life. Stimulating a sufficient interest among the members during the chapter's infancy is a must if the chapter is to survive. Have interesting meetings. Invite outsiders who are excellent speakers and skilled in some area of aviation to deliver demonstrations, lectures, narrate during movies or the showing of "slides", etc. Obtain interesting and fairly current movies and don't make the mistake of digging up old moth-eaten antiquated military training films as did Chapter "X." A film's age isn't always of any significance, so it is better to screen all movies and reject those not suitable. Always respect the members and don't show a foul oldie movie simply for the sake of preparing a program for chapter meetings. Either appoint or allow several to volunteer as a meeting program committee. This group will work closely with the chapter's officers and will be responsible for the program at each meeting. No person cares to attend a dull meeting regardless of the nature of the organization involved. Naturally, there should be a person or persons appointed to notify each member of every scheduled and emergency chapter meeting. The chapter could have fines for those

who miss meetings, with said fines going into various chapter funds.

Personalities play a large part in the welfare of the chapter. Each chapter has at least one "authority", "floor hog", "eager beaver", "cynic", etc. These members can be of value to the chapter if approached properly. Chapter "X's" "authority" was also the "cynic" and "floor hog" and was also the "senior member." Colonel Blimp had a tremendous background in civil and military aviation and various phases of aviation. He could have become of value to the chapter, but stated early in the game that he was willing to act only in the advisory capacity and would not spend outside time in behalf of the group. Advise he did! No meeting ended without his taking over and launching into an endless dissertation. He loved words and the sound of his voice and would say the same thing many times but with different words and inflections. He criticized our meetings' programs, although none of us cared to hear him talk all night. He criticized various members' efforts but actually seldom produced constructive criticism. He ruined nearly every meeting he attended.

The best approach to the Col. Blimps is a direct but diplomatic endeavor. Give them praise where praise is due, but in a very firm but gentle way let them know what harm they are causing. Next, tell them what benefit they could be to the chapter and ask for their cooperation instead of tyranny. That a man has been active in aviation for forty years or has lived past his fiftieth birthday doesn't excuse him for having poor manners or for trying to ride rough shod over others. It's normal for the old timers to want to preach to us youngsters, yet they often can do much harm to a group. Nevertheless, we should encourage the youngsters and oldsters alike to join and support our chapters. The oldsters can give much by using their wealth of skills and experiences. The youngsters provide much of the zest and enthusiasm.

A prospective chapter might think it is in a poor geographical location, aviation-wise. Again, the direct approach is the answer. Seek the help or support of local pastors, businessmen, educators, bankers, newspapers, those active in aviation, and just anyone who can be of healthy influence. Make an effort to let everyone in the small town(s) hear about the EAA. Approach the educators of the elementary schools and colleges (if any) and show them the educational value associated

with becoming an EAAer. Arrange to show movies of EAA Fly-Ins before student and civic groups. Don't neglect the small fry; for they grow up quite suddenly.

In fine, be pests . . . but very enjoyable and likeable pests. Have an intelligent answer for practically any type of question about the EAA. Know the functions and purposes of the EAA so well that you become a very convincing salesman. Make good use of all the chapter organizational material made available by EAA Headquarters. If possible, try to have a completed homebuilt on hand to show the public, even if you are forced to ask a neighboring chapter to supply the ship. Frequently, a prospective member thinks that he has no place to serve as a shop, and often wives or parents frown on their basements, garages, or attics being turned into shops. Try to have a chapter shop large enough to handle several homebuilt aircraft projects. Leave no stone unturned in your effort to obtain new members and the support of your community. Attempt to have a chapter project underway as soon as there are enough members to apply for a charter. This project will add interest to the meetings and will help to obtain new members.

At no time should alcoholic drinks be served before, during, or after chapter meetings. There certainly would be no harm done were some member to deliver a prayer during each meeting. Always try to preserve the chapter's honor and dignity and avoid those things which will endanger same. Each and every member should be encouraged to participate in chapter functions; for this is the only way a new chapter will be able to survive its growing and organizational problems . . . and the only way an older established chapter can maintain its security. Whether old or new, a chapter will survive only if its members are willing to make certain personal sacrifices and to give of themselves by applying their talents, skills, and ingenuity in performing the many and various chapter functions, and in supplying the many chapter needs. No chapter can survive for long without the all-out support of its members.

Now, the ideas presented in this treatise are not the only solutions for adding to a chapter's longevity or for breathing life into an established but slightly deteriorated chapter. Members of other organizations might provide very intelligent pointers concerning group activity and how to solve chapter problems. Whatever strategy you intend to use so as to organize or improve a chapter, here's wishing you much luck and success. (A)



The Bede XB1D, a pusher boundary layer control aircraft, has been donated to the EAA Air Education Museum by Jim Bede of Cleveland, Ohio. This advanced design started in 1960 and was powered by two Franklin 165 hp engines mounted one above the other in the honeycomb sandwich constructed fuselage. The metal wings have thousands of tiny holes in their surface and many flights were conducted as a research aircraft. It was brought to the EAA Museum on a truck by EAA Director Val Brugger and EAA member Les Kellogg. It is now on display in the Air Museum.