



The History of the Prop Masters R/C Aero Club



While walking out of the October 2007 meeting I was approached by Dave Cotton, our Club Secretary, who asked if I would compile a history of our club; perhaps something that could be posted on our Website. Dave pointed out that I was one of the oldest members in the club, that's oldest as in time being a member and not age wise, and I was good at writing stuff. I'm not sure about that part either. But I said that I would give it a shot. I would like to mention that I had a lot of help putting this together. Mel Ziska supplied a great deal of the early history since he was one of the founding members. Marv Luebbert and Bob Mosinski also helped by supplying details and dates. So here it is. The History of the Prop Master's R/C Aero Club as told to me and as told by me to you.

The following came from Mel Ziska, with a little editing by me.

Lisle Aero's beginning appears to be in 1977 with 15 members. The AMA charter number, #397, would have been issued at that time. The first field was in Lisle just north of Short Street and West of RT53. Meetings were held in the Short Street Park District building. The field was moved to the park along RT 53 for a short time. In 1980 a new location was secured south of Butterfield Road just east of Finley. After a short period the Club moved to the Eola Road Elementary School, Aurora, in 1983. The school officials were happy to have us around to "keep an eye" on the property when school was out. We flew inside a chain link fenced-in yard behind the school. The building is still at that location but now surrounded by homes. Prior to the new construction, an early morning flyer could find pheasant, deer, wolf, ducks and many other types of wildlife in the surrounding natural habitat. Prior to moving to the Dragon Lake location the Club was without a field. The Woodland Club opened its field for our members to fly at while a new location was constructed. The first Dragon Lake field (1983-84) was on the East side of Naper/Plainfield Road near the old dog park. There still may be our cement grass roller somewhere in the weeds at that field.

We also did air shows at the Short Street site, even in the middle of a carnival. Merlin Graves flew his F-15 twin ducted fan off the grass at the carnival. He had to stop it by running into a soccer goal net. A few air shows were flown just behind the cemetery off south Washington in Naperville. We also flew at the Jane Adams School just off south Washington (now Weber Rd) at Lilly Cache in Bolingbrook before the first Dragon Lake site was completed.

Several of the early members are still active in the hobby. Steve Gawlik and Armin Weber joined in 1980 and Steve was president in 1983 and 1984. Armin also held officer positions. Pat Walsh, Gary Koester, Pat Rodriguez, Mel Ziska, Mike Kosteci led the club in years that followed. Steve and Armin built a few of Dave Patrick's TOC models during that time and Steve's name is listed under the builder credits on the "Wring it Out" videos.

I joined the club in February 1991. At that time the club was known as the Lisle Aero Modelers or just plain Lisle Aero. The meetings were held at the Lisle Park District Meadows Center on the corner of 59th Street and Westview lane in Lisle. Meetings were held on the second Wednesday of the month. I found out about the club from a flyer I got from HobbyTown when it was located in the mall directly east of the Fox Valley mall next to the K-Mart. Both the K-Mart and HobbyTown are no longer there. HobbyTown offered a free ground school for people interested in flying R/C and they passed out Lisle Aero flyers at the end of class. I had never heard of Lisle Aero until I got the flyer from HobbyTown, since at that time, information passed out at hobby shops and word of mouth were about the only methods available for clubs to advertise and recruit members. There was no Lisle Aero website back in 1991. I'm not sure many people even heard of the Internet in 1991. We didn't get a club web site until much later, when Bill Robinson built ours about 1998. Now we advertise our club not only with flyers and word of mouth but a website and business cards. But our best advertisement is when people come to the field and watch us fly.

When I joined, there were about thirty members in the club. You would see maybe half at the Fun-Flys and a few more at the meetings. The small group of members made it easy to get to know everyone and there were always conversations about new models and flying. If you had any questions there were plenty of folks to ask. Then, like now, you could bring in a model you were having a problem with and several people were more than willing to help you resolve it. Sometime you didn't want to hear what they had to say but they were honest. The best instance of this is when someone brought in a



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kit, literally a box of sticks. I don't remember the brand but I remember it was a biplane kit. All he had for instructions was one sheet of typing paper with an exploded view of how all the pieces should go together. The consensus was that he should just return it, get something else and start again. They would even tell you when you had too much model for your flying ability.

I remember hearing stories about the Eola Rd. location, the fence and the cornfield. The older members used to speak of how tough it was making a landing especially when the corn was high. The tassels on top of the corn stalk would tear the covering on the bottom of the wings and fuselage. The running joke was that "You were attacked by the Corn Piranha". Now how can you forget a phrase like "Corn Piranha"? But the first field I flew from, as a club member, was at our present location but at that time it was called Dragon Lake and not Springbrook Prairie.

In 1992 the Forest Preserve District planned to close all of the flying fields. Their plan was to turn all of the forest preserves into nature parks where humans would not disturb the birds and furry woodland creatures. We looked at purchasing our own land. Figuring on about ten acres minimum the cost would have been about \$60,000 or about \$1500 per member, a lot of money especially in 1992. Fortunately once the Forest Preserve's new usage plan was made public it was opposed by many organizations besides just the R/C flyers and it was changed. The district's next plan was to improve the Water Fall Glen and Pratt Wayne fields and close Dragon Lake. So Dragon Lake was marked as a temporary field. Fortunately there were problems granting public access to the Water Fall Glen flying site and tight finances kept them from improving the other fields and closing Dragon Lake. Gradually the members of the Forest Preserve board changed. New usage plans began to include the flying field at Dragon Lake.

At the time I became a member the field had already been moved to its present location. There was no paved runway, no shelters, no fence and no path to the field, but parking was much easier. To get to the field from the parking lot you followed a beaten down path made when the truck with the mower came out to cut the field grass. Your best bet for hauling your plane and stuff out to the field was a coaster wagon or yard waste wagon, something with larger wheels. You couldn't really drag your models to the field because of the tire ruts and tall grass. So you either carried your model or packed it on top of the field box that was packed on top of your coaster wagon. After a rain the ruts would fill with water so you had to take care and not upset your wagon. I once had my new transmitter fall into the water after my wagon tipped over in a rut. I spent two days drying it out with a hair drier before it worked again. On another trip my coaster wagon tipped over and snapped the wing on my trainer. Good thing I was going back to my car after a flying session.

Before the runway installation the field consisted of a grass rectangle approximately 300' by 180' for takeoff and landings. The field was surrounded by tall grass much as it is on three sides today. On the North side the grass was waist high. There were several "paths" through this tall grass along the North side where the pit area is. The pilots would walk through these "paths" to take their model to the field. The tall grass along the North side of the field acted as a natural barrier between the flying field and the spectators. The spectator area did contain several tables like today and one or two tables were in the pit area.

Then as now, the grass was only cut once a week, usually on Thursdays. So if you wanted to fly and the grass was high, especially on Wednesdays, you took off corner to corner. Your best angle was to start your take off run where the big forest preserve sign is currently at the northeast corner of the field and head towards the southwest corner. Unless there was a good breeze, you took off in this direction no matter which way the wind blew because this gave you the longest take off run. To take off you kicked in full throttle and full up elevator. Once you got the wheels out of the grass, you had to correct your attitude so you didn't stall. But at the same time you needed to dodge the group of trees you were headed for in the southwest corner. You could always tell when the grass was high because you could see the tracks where the props cut it during the takeoff and landing runs.

The story of our runway is an interesting one. Both Mel Ziska and Marv Luebbert helped me put this together so I'd get it straight. Hopefully I finally got it right. Thanks to both.



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Because of the problems using the field when the grass was high the club members had always talked about getting some type of runway installed. In July of 1996 Marv Luebbert put those ideas into writing. Being unable to attend the July meeting he sent me a letter saying that since improvements to the District's preserves were in the planning stages, this would be a good time to ask for a "hard surface" runway at Dragon Lake. He also suggested that the runway be made out of crushed limestone, or the same material that the District was going to use for the new paths. The thought being, that since we were marked as a "temporary field", it would be easier to sell the "hard surface" runway to the Forest Preserve Board rather than a concrete or asphalt runway. Marv also suggested that we say that we're willing to put up some club money to help finance the improvement.

At the July meeting I asked Bill Brown, the club's District Rep, to broach the subject with the District. Bill met a District official and said that we really would like to have a "hard surface" runway at the Dragon Lake field. This District official happened to be a full-scale pilot and shared Bill's enthusiasm for flight and flying. Bill said the club had some money saved but did not have the blessing of the District for the project. The District official said that the runway needed to be paved and gave us an estimate on the cost per foot for a paved runway. Once we had this information we, the club, needed to move and move quickly.

After getting a price per foot, next we needed to know how long the runway needed to be. As president at the time, I formed the "Runway" committee. It was the Runway Committee's job to find out how long of a runway we needed and where it should be placed on our field. With the help of the guys at the Fox Valley Aero Club and using their paved runway for tests, our committee set about to determine just how long a runway we needed. The answer turned out to be one hundred and fifty feet. This was determined to be a good distance for forty-size models to take off and land, but we were primarily concerned with take offs.

With that in mind a proposal was drafted and brought before the club. The proposal was to spend \$6,000 from the field fund to install a one hundred and fifty foot asphalt runway at the Dragon Lake field. There was a lot of debate on the subject, most of which centered on the cost. Many members felt that if we looked outside of the District we could get the runway installed at a much lower cost. The problem was that either the District installed the runway as part of their improvement project or it didn't get installed. The proposal was finally passed and the club authorized spending the field fund money for the project.

We submitted our proposal in writing in September of 1996 to get the matter on the District's agenda. The club requested a runway that was a minimum of one hundred fifty feet in length and twenty-four feet in width. We would contribute \$6,000 towards the cost of its construction and we would maintain the runway after constructions. Early in 1997, the Forest Preserve approved the project and it was placed on their schedule. A quick note here, if you actually measure the runway, it's really two hundred feet long. As I understand it some left over money was found in the District's parking lot fund and that paid for the additional fifty feet of runway. In June of 1997 the runway and most of the other improvements, such as the walking path, were complete. The facility was then renamed Springbrook Prairie.

An interesting note concerning the runway construction, I was President at the time the runway was being built and I received a call from a Naperville newspaper reporter. She was writing a story about the Forest Preserve District spending District funds to improve a private facility, namely our field. She was very disappointed to hear that the club was financing the field improvement and that it was a public and not private facility, open to anyone with a Forest Preserve permit. I invited her to the field but she never showed up. Since then, the Naperville press has written several very favorable articles about our club and the flying field.

2002 was a very busy year for the club. In January we had to move our meeting location from the Lisle Park District building that we had occupied at least since I became a member to a meeting room at the Knox Presbyterian Church in Naperville. Due to the high demand for meeting rooms, the Lisle Park District had decided to begin charging \$25 to \$50



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an hour rent. The rate depended on the number of Lisle residents in the organization. If over 50% of your club membership were Lisle residents, you got the lower rate. Well we didn't have anywhere near 50% of our membership living in Lisle so we were looking at the \$50 an hour rate. That would have cost the club \$150 a month for just room rental. Not surprising, it was also about that time we decided to change the name of the club. After several suggestions the club took a vote and the Lisle Aero Modelers became the Prop Masters R/C Aero Club.

The year 2003 brought some additional changes to the club, namely a new meeting location. We had out-grown the meeting room at Knox Presbyterian Church in Naperville and we moved to our current location at Dean's Dugout. It was also the year we got some major improvement to our flying site. We worked with the Forest Preserve District and built shelters and had a safety fence installed. Our club field fund paid for the shelters while the forest preserve again supplied all of the construction labor. The Forest Preserve District was also good enough to purchase and install the chain link safety fence the borders the pit area and runs along the North edge of the field. They also began a tree-trimming project that improved the area around the field. But best of all, the District also lengthen the weekend flying hours to 9:00 am until sunset from the previous hours of 10:00 am until 6:30 PM.

In the spring of 2004 Bob and his dad "Big Jer" Mosinski constructed a new impound stand to replace the aging A-Frame one that had been a fixture at the field since I joined the club back in 1991. This brings up an interesting story. One of the advantages of being the writer is that I get to include some of my favorite stories about being a club member. One of these concerns our old impound stand. Not the red and white stand Bob and Bob's Dad, "Big Jer", Mosinski built but the older brown "A-Frame" stand. As with all field improvements the District has to approve them. Well as the story goes the guys building it showed the plans to someone at the District. The District guy questioned the numbered slots we use to mark what frequencies are in use. The guys explained their usage, at which point the District person indicated that these also needed to be marked in BRAILLE for the blind flyers. Since they never were in Braille, I will assume that enough explaining was done to get that request changed.

In September of that year we beat the Barnstormers in our yearly competition for the first time in close to fifteen years. Yes that's right fifteen years. The traveling trophy was finally ours. Mark Fenrich, our President at the time, authorized some cash from our operating fund to be used for prize money during one of our practice sessions. He hoped that this would spur us on. It must have worked since we did win and have continued winning since then.

In 2005 the District began its tree trimming projects. They began clearing tall brush and trees on the West and South of the field. They continued to make these and other improvements to the area that also benefits our flying site. The club has also continued to improve our field. Our latest field improvement is the new starting benches. So we no longer have to kneel down to start our models. This helps us older pilots since our knees don't bend as well as they used to.

So here we are, 2007. Our club is thirty years old. Our club membership has continued to grow. When I joined the club we had about 30 members on the roster. We are currently hovering around 100 members. New people have joined others have moved away. Guys like Dick Menze, Sam Kohler, Walt Watson and "Big Jer", Mosinski have passed away and will be missed. We no longer hold our Swap-N-Shop swap meet, which was the club's big fundraiser when I joined. Instead we have a club table at most of the area swap meets to generate revenue. Our annual club family picnic was reinstated several years ago and has been going strong ever since. We have also added an annual Air Show in the spring to encourage new flyers and members. With the introduction of ARF's, electric flight and 3-D flying younger pilots are entering the hobby. So the future looks good for both our hobby and the Prop Masters.

So there you have it, The History of the Prop Masters R/C Aero Club as told by me!

Larry Dudkowski

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