

# The WingNut



EAA Chapter One Flabob Airport (RIR) Riverside, CA

Volume 58, Issue 2

**We make flying FUN!**

February 2011

## Ray Stits to receive 'Master Pilot Award'

### **FAA to present the Wright Bros. award at our Chapter Meeting**

EAA Chapter One Founder and groundskeeper Ray Stits will be honored at the February 12th Chapter Meeting by receiving the Wright Brothers "Master Pilots Award" from the Federal Aviation Administration.

This award is given by the FAA to pilots who have had a sterling flying record for 50 or more years (Ray has 65-plus years in his logbooks).

Join us for a "build your own hoagie" luncheon and Chapter Meeting as Ray is presented this prestigious award. As a "Master Mechanic," Ray will be one of a handful of pilots in the U.S. who have both the Master Pilots and Master Mechanic awards. We are proud to see our chapter founder so honored.



*Ray Stits and his Sky Baby—the World's Smallest Airplane*

## **Ray Stits—born to build, born to fly**

In the moonlit desert nights during the 1930s in Phoenix, AZ, teenage boys dreamed of making their mark in the world of new technology. Many dreamed of owning and driving the hottest car in town. Some lucky few dreamed of entering the exciting world of aviation as airline pilots or barnstormers. One young lad, who attended school on 29th Avenue, dreamed of becoming a pilot, too. But he didn't want to be an airline pilot. Or a barnstormer. He wanted to design and build the airplanes he would fly.

"I never had any intention of flying for hire," Ray Stits said. Ray knew, from the time he was a dozen years old, that his future was to be in aviation. He was in love with airplanes...not just with flying them, but with building them. Flying, for him, was a hands-on affair, a way to express his mechanically creative spirit.

"In 1936, my brother and I went out to a private field in Phoenix and took rides in a Piper Cub" Ray said. "We had saved our money, and it was \$2 for a half-hour ride. I was about 15 or 16 years old at the time." It was a big adventure for the Stits boys.



*Ray flying his Flut-R-Bug*

Ray's next involvement with aviation came in 1941, when he saw a newspaper advertisement by Southwest Airways, Inc., which recruited and trained airplane pilots for the government. The company needed airplane mechanics. "They'd give you three months of training, then put you to work for 50-cents an hour," Ray said. "That doesn't sound like much, but at the time room and board was only \$10 a week."

Ray completed the Southwest Airways training and took a job with the company in Phoenix. The next year, while earning good money, he began taking flying lessons in a Taylorcraft at a private airport on North 7th Avenue.

*(Continued on Page 3)*

# EAA Chapter One

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### **Plane of the Month:**

# Calendar



### February 2011

#### **4th – First Friday Flicks**

Chapter One Hangar - 5 p.m.

#### **12th – Young Eagles**

Chapter One Hangar - 8 a.m.

#### **12th – Chapter Meeting**

Chapter One Hangar - 1 p.m.

#### **12th – Board Meeting**

Chapter One Hangar - 3 p.m.

#### **19th – Design Group Meeting**

Chapter One Hangar - 9 a.m.

### March 2011

#### **7th – First Friday Flicks**

Chapter One Hangar - 5 p.m.

#### **8th – Young Eagles**

Chapter One Hangar - 8 a.m.

#### **8th – Chapter Meeting**

Chapter One Hangar - 1 p.m.

#### **8th – Board Meeting**

Chapter One Hangar - 3 p.m.

#### **19th – Design Group Meeting**

Chapter One Hangar - 9 a.m.

#### **26th – Riverside Air Show**

Riverside Airport - all day

### April 2011

#### **1st – First Friday Flicks**

Chapter One Hangar - 5 p.m.

#### **9th – Young Eagles**

Chapter One Hangar - 8 a.m.

#### **9th – Chapter Meeting**

Chapter One Hangar - 1 p.m.

#### **9th – Board Meeting**

Chapter One Hangar - 3 p.m.

#### **16th – Design Group Meeting**

Chapter One Hangar - 9 a.m.

# Ray Stits-born to build, born to fly *(Continued from Page 1)*

"Then the war came, and everything shut down," he said. As Ray worked his way up to crew chief on BT-13s, his flying came to a halt on June 20, 1942, the day he began his 21st year on this earth

Soon after, one of Ray's friends at Southwest Airways became sick and needed to go home to Michigan for treatment.



Ray, being a good friend, took a leave of absence from the company, loaded his friend into his 1940 Mercury, and took off for Michigan. By the time they arrived, they were not only tired...they were broke. "We were kind of short on money, so I got a job in Marshall, Michigan," Ray said. "That's where I met Edith."

Ray got a job as an aircraft mechanic. In the evenings he would return to work and volunteer as an instructor in welding, an art which he had mastered by this time. "I didn't get paid for it," he said, "I did it to be around the girls." One of his "Rosie the riveter" type students was a pretty little gal named Edith Janes. Ray was smitten. He wooed and pursued the hapless welding neophyte until she gave in to his advances, and they began dating

Now it was 1943, and Ray was a tax-paying citizen of the state of Michigan. He began flying lessons again, in an Aeronca K. But again his flying got interrupted as he was called into the service. He had gotten a year's exemption from military duty due to his expertise as an airplane mechanic.

When he was discharged from the military, on February 19, Ray and Edith had taken the vows of holy matrimony (The vows obviously stuck, and 66 years later, they are still a loving couple), and he promptly bought a "busted up" J-3 Cub for \$600 and rebuilt it. He took lessons in, and got his private ticket in, this aircraft. "At that time, the CAA inspectors came around from airport to airport," Ray said. "The main thing they looked for was your ability handle an airplane. We had to do two-turn spins and come out on a heading. At Marshall Airport, there was a hundred-foot-circle on the grass strip, in which you had to land without bouncing." On October 5, 1945, Ray was signed off as a private pilot.

Ray was working as a free-lance mechanic in Marshall, and picking up a lot of flying time delivering airplanes. "There was a lot of military surplus airplanes, PT-19s and PT-17s, and I delivered them to the customers," he said. "That was one of the best summers I ever had."

After a management change at Marshall Airfield caused the atmosphere there to change, Ray and his bride moved to Reno, NV, where "there was lots of work." While working in Reno, Ray bought a PT-22 with 13 hours since new on the engine for \$700. He flew that for a while, then sold it and bought a Travelaire, then sold it and moved back to Battle Creek, MI.

In Battle Creek, he opened a little free-lance mechanic shop where he got to fly a lot of test flights of aircraft he worked on. After helping a friend build a Goodyear racer ("It was a dog, but I learned a lot"), Ray came up with the idea of building the world's smallest airplane. He and a bunch of pilots were talking about Steve Wittman's 12-foot wingspan airplane. "So, if I built an airplane with a 10-foot wingspan, that would be the smallest in the world," Ray said. One of the pilots there said, "Oh, Stits, you can't do it!" That was all it took! Three months later, the Stits Junior, a biplane with an 8-foot-10-inch-wingspan, was ready to fly.

Ray was too large to fly the tiny creation, so he recruited another pilot of the field, who weighed about 110-115 pounds, to fly it. The smallish pilot was the right size, but

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# Ray Stits—born to build, born to fly *(Continued from Page 3)*

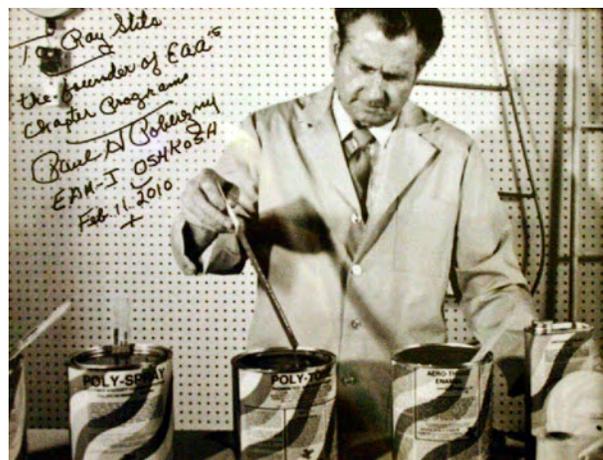
lacked the ability to handle the tiny plane. "Out of the first five flights, he damaged the airplane three times," Ray said. The aircraft's CG was so critical that when the pilot got out of the airplane, Ray had to put a sack of rocks into the seat to keep it from tipping forward.

Ray eventually struck a deal with Bob Starr, a former P-51 pilot and crop duster, to fly the "world's smallest plane" at airshows. They called the CAA to come down and observe flights of the Junior and license it for experimental and exhibition flying. Ray built a trailer, and the two of them took it to major airshows all over the country. The publicity it generated was tremendous, and Ray received requests for plans from all over.

In the fall of 1950, Ray moved his family to Arizona, where he could work in the warm weather. Starr and his family moved there also. Ray initially began as a free-lance mechanic at Sky Harbor Airport, but then heard of a job in Tucson returning B-29s to service. During 1950 and 1951, Ray worked the night shift. During the days, he worked building airplanes. But getting the supplies he needed was a problem. "Everything I needed, I had to order from the West Coast," he said. "So I researched the West Coast airports from San Jose to San Diego. Then one weekend, I drove over to Riverside-Arlington Airport. The Riverside airport seemed ideal to me; it was in the center of everything, and had ideal access to the main highways." The folks at that airport (now called Riverside Municipal) weren't interested in renting a plane to the budding aircraft builder.



So Ray drove across the river to the West Riverside Airport (now known as Flabob). "There were four hangars and one little cement block building," Ray said. "They said they were interested and would rent me a hangar for \$15 per month." Two weeks later, Ray resigned at Tucson and moved his family to Riverside. Starr, who flew the Stits "World's Smallest Airplane" came along. "We made pretty good money flying airshows," Ray said. Ray got a job at Pacific Airmotive Corp. at Chino Airport, working night shift putting C-54s back into service. He worked there at night and during the day built airplanes.



The Stits Junior took a beating when it was landed off-field due to carb icing. "Instead of rebuilding it again, I decided to build another, even smaller plane," Ray said. Thirteen months later, Ray had created the Stits Sky Baby, a tiny biplane with a wingspan of 7' 2" and a length of under 10 feet. Ray widely publicized the "first flight" of the world's smallest plane, which was held May 26, 1952 at Palm Springs Airport.

"It was a big event," Ray said. "Lots of people came out to see it and lots of media guys, including the *LA Times* and *Life Magazine* and newsreel guys. We got world-wide publicity." The Sky Baby generated a lot of interest. It was featured in the "Smiling Jack" comics of 1953, and was listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. After just a few flights, Ray donated his record holding biplane to the National Air and Space Museum. In 1963, the Sky Baby was

placed on long-term loan to the EAA AirVenture Museum.

Many people from around the globe wrote to Ray requesting plans for the little planes, but Ray knew that, due to the complexity of the aircraft and the skill needed to fly them, they were not designed for the average builder or pilot. Being an entrepreneur by nature, Ray couldn't let all these good leads go to waste. "I decided that there was a market for a good sport airplane, so I set out to build my ideas into an airplane," Ray said. "The airplane I had envisioned for

*(Continued on Page 5)*

# Ray Stits—born to build, born to fly *(Continued from Page 4)*

years turned out to be the Playboy"— an airplane that was great flyer, and lives on in the designs of Richard VanGrunsven's RV- series.

In 1954, Pacific Airmotive ended their night shift, so Ray resigned and went over to Ontario Airport to work at Lockheed on the night shift. Now he was selling Playboy plans and building and designing other experimental planes during the days at his hangar at Flabob. He made a two-place Playboy, then designed the single-place and two-place tandem Flut-R-Bug in 1955, then the two-place side-by-side Flut-R-Bug in 1956. Also in '56, he designed and built his first Skycoupe, a high-wing two-place design that underwent a lot of modifications over the next few years and eventually became Ray's only type-certified aircraft.

Around 1953, Ray got wind of by a Milwaukee pilot named Paul Aircraft Association, dedicated to tacted Ray and invited him to join kee was a long way to travel for a Poberezny that EAA begin chapter in local group meetings. The laws to allow chapters, and Ray ers to join and formed EAA Chap-



While doing all this, Ray built huge supplier of aircraft supplies. build or repair an airplane," Ray wood, you name it." It was the Aircraft Spruce of its day.

In the early 1960s, Ray heard that the EAA was having a contest for designing/building folding wing airplanes. Being Ray Stits, he jumped in and designed his final major design--the Stits Playmate--for the folding-wing airplane market. The beautiful two-or-three-place folding-wing design became an instant classic in the homebuilt community, and he sold some 175 plans within a short time.

"They say that necessity is the mother of invention," Ray said. "And it was necessity that prompted the development of Stits Polyfiber." Along about 1961, Ray was disposing of some scrap aircraft covering. "I took it outside to burn it," he said, noting, "You could do that in those days. I leaned down and put a match to it, and....whoosh! It blew up in my face. It was extremely flammable!"

Ray's vision for the Playmate was for an airplane that you could hook up to the back of your car, tow it home, and store it in the garage. "But the nitric dope on polyester was so flammable, that it would make an airplane in the garage a fire hazard. One spark, and it could burn down your house," he said. So he embarked on a quest to design a fabric aircraft covering that would not burn. For more than four years, he investigated and researched, getting a self-taught education in chemistry.

In 1965, Ray certified Stits Polyfiber as an approved aircraft covering--one that not only was not explosive, it

a new organization that was formed Poberezny called the Experimental homebuilt aircraft. Poberezny con- the new group. Ray felt that Milwau- group meeting, so he suggested to ters, where homebuilders could gath- newly formed EAA changed its by- rounded up a dozen or so local build- ter One at Flabob Airport.

Flabob-based Stits Aircraft into a "We had anything you needed to said, "tubing, covering, spinners,

*(Continued on Page 6)*

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# FROM OUR READERS...

May I tell a short story which explains what a fine person Jim Pyle was: I sat quite frustrated in my hangar in Hamburg, Germany, after days before I experienced an inflight engine failure with my 1941 Aeronca Chief (managed to get her down without hurting her and me). The replica fiberglass engine cowling was the reason, no good cooling air management for the A65-8, needed a metal cowling to fix the problem, no drawings, no idea how the original cowling had looked like. While sitting there I dashed thru a Sport Aviation magazine, an article of the Flabob kids restoring exactly the same type of plane caught my attention. The rest of the story is short: the first person I could get hold of at Chapter 1 was Jim, he immediately offered help and found the right people at Flabob to help me. Since then I have visited him several times over the past years. I eventually picked up my new perfect metal cowling which ever since looks great on my Chief. Last December I put a placard on it to honor Jim, I lost a dear friend, as we all did, and will always remember him.

I hope I did not bother you with my story.

Best Regards from Hamburg, Germany  
Bernhard Conrad  
EAA546194  
proud member of Chapter 1

Hello to all,

I am sorry to bear sad news: my father, Dick Hein, passed away last week.

During the last several years of his life, the folks at EA Chapter 1 were dear to him, and many of you helped both him and me immeasurably in the aftermath of his accident. My brother and I are deeply thankful for that. He died at home of natural causes.

Best regards,  
Deborah Testa

## **Ray Stits—born to build, born to fly** *(Continued from Page 5)*

wouldn't burn. By '71, he had developed all the pigments, primers, urethane and finishes--42 formulae in all.

The Stits Polyfiber covering process took the aviation world by storm. By 1972, the Stits Aviation catalogue had dropped all aircraft items except for covering materials. Polyfiber had become a multi-million dollar company that sold its materials world-wide.

While accomplishing all this, Ray continued his life-long love affair with flying. "Through the years, I spent a lot of hours ferrying planes to customers all over the country and test flying planes I had worked on as a mechanic," he said. "I did the test flying of every plane I designed and built, with the exception of the first two (The Stits Jr. and the Stits Sky Baby, due to weight and CG problems)."

Along the way Ray picked up "a few" ratings -- commercial, instrument, multi-engine, single- and multi-engine seaplane, glider (air tow and ground tow), helicopter and gyroplane. He even soloed in a hot air balloon. His stable of aircraft has included a J-3 Cub, PT-22, BT-15, AT-6, 2000 Travelaire, Cessna 182, and a Remos LSA. Plus the many Stits Aircraft he built.

Now, after 66 years as a pilot, Ray is looking forward to his newest airplane--a Cessna 162 Skycatcher, which is scheduled for delivery sometime in May.

When it arrives, he and Edith will climb aboard and head to Big Bear for breakfast, as they have done time after time, year after year. For Ray, flying is second nature, as natural as walking...and a lot more fun!

**SALE!**

**\$5**

**SALE!**



**February  
Special!**

**Price good  
this month!**

**Get 'em before they're gone!**

## **Chapter 1 Ed Marquart T-shirts**

**What a deal!** These beautiful Ed Marquart commemorative T-shirts are on sale during the month of February for only \$5! Celebrating one of Flabob's great builders/designers, this shirt features a beautiful drawing of a Marquart Charger flying in front of Mt. Rubidoux, with a famous picture of Ed plus Chapter One and Marquart logos. High quality T-shirts available in Sizes S, M, L, XL, and XXL. Mail orders add \$5 shipping/handling (\$10 total; extra shirts add \$2). If you're local, pick up your shirt at the hangar for \$5 during our Feb. 12 membership meeting, or through the week contact Jan Buttermore at 951-318-5215 . If you're not local, call Leon at 800-225-5865 to place your order. Get 'em now! *February is a short month!*

# Flabob Express DC-3 joins others for 75th anniversary celebration

By Wes Blasjo

The leadership of the American Aviation Historical Society had been looking for a location and date to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the DC-3, but had been stymied until they joined forces with the Santa Monica Aviation Museum. The celebration had been planned for late December, but weather and other things conspired to prevent this. It was then rescheduled for January 29 at the Santa Monica Airport. This was appropriate as DC-3s had been built at Santa Monica as well as Long Beach and other locations.

The Flabob Express DC-3 and the Commemorative Air Force's C-47 had been flown to Santa Monica on Friday afternoon as a hedge against morning fog. The CAF had their pilots and ground support there for static display and tours of the very spartan interior of a former military airplane. Historical/commemorative flights had been advertised by the AAHS for a donation. Originally there were only enough passengers for two flights. When people saw this beautiful bird and heard the beautiful music those two radial engines made, they were two more flights added. Insurance and FAA regulations permit only the pilot and co-pilot and eight passengers (souls on board).

As the passengers were leaving the plane they were all smiles and commented that this was a "once in a lifetime" experience. They couldn't thank us enough for preserving a piece of history for them to enjoy. Even those who just came to watch and hear that beautiful roar of the engines expressed thanks and appreciation for such a great experience.

One couple really got into the spirit of things and came dressed in clothing typical of the '40's. The woman was complete with a large purse of that vintage and stockings with wide seams down the back. Can any of you remember hearing or saying, "Your seams are not straight"?

At noon the Santa Monica Aviation Museum put on a program featuring Tim Williams from the AAHS giving a brief history of the DC-3s and then co-pilot Blake LeMar telling what it was like flying as co-pilot on a DC-3s for the airlines. Shortly after that the two airplanes took off and joined up in flight for the 30 minute flight to Riverside. There were many misty eyes as people stood there waving goodbye and hearing that beautiful sound fade off as the airplanes disappeared over the Los Angeles skyline.

## DC 3 Crew:

Jon Goldenbaum	Pilot
Blake LeMar	Co-pilot
Kevin McKenzie	Co-pilot
Don Newman	Crew chief/Flight engineer
Pan Mitchell	Stewardess
Travis Gammill	Ground support
Austin Jones	Ground support
Sam Pratt	Official Observer
Wes Blasjo	Ground support

## Young Eagles pilots fly at Imperial County

(Continued from Page 9)

### Pilots Who Flew:

Larry Conley	Ercoupe
Jerry Cortez	Vans RV6A
Irvin Craig	Cessna 182
Tom Jones	Piper L-21A

Virginia Harmer	Piper Cherokee
Jim Meeker	Taylorcraft BC 12D
Gerald Perry	Citabria
Jim Piper	Bellanca 14-13-3 (Tricycle gear)
Joel Shank	Cessna 152
Loreen Wynja	Cessna 172



# 121 Young Eagles flown in January

January's Young Eagle Flight went down as another successful introduction of youth to aviation. One hundred twenty one kids took to the skies under the skillful flying of 14 Chapter One pilots. We welcome Flabobian Anthony Ochinuga to the ranks of Ch. 1 Young Eagle pilots. Also, we welcome back Ray Stits and his new Remos airplane. It has been over a year since Ray flew Young Eagles

As usual, Tiffany Felton taught the mini ground school. Chris Felton was home for the weekend and was drafted into doing the preflight instruction. He first had to take Travis Gammill's dog Peaches back to Travis's hangar as the dogcatcher was at Flabob collecting stray dogs. The instruction necessary for the Boy Scout merit badges was done by Bob Barton, Al Gester, and Bob Lum. Kathy Rohm and Charlene Rhoades did their usual checking of parent consent forms for legibility and completeness. This is such a great help because when the computer people print the certificates and can't read the names or have incomplete information, it slows down the whole process. Once behind in this, it is difficult to play "catch-up!"

Thanks to everyone who helped make things run smoothly and efficiently.

**Wes Blasjo, Young Eagle Coordinator**

## Pilots Who Flew:

John Alling	Piper Comanche 260
Larry Conley	Ercoupe
Jerry Cortez	Vans RV 6
Dave Cudney	Cherokee 180
Barry Duble	Cherokee 235
Carah Durell	Cessna 150

Tom Jones	Piper L-21A
Kevin McKenzie	Marquart Charger
Jim Meeker	Taylorcraft BC 12 D
Anthony Oshinuga	Cessna 152
Gerald Perry	Citabria
Ray Stits	Remos
Allan Teets	Cessna 172
Walt Wasowski	Cessna 172

# 65 Young Eagles flown at Imperial County

On January 29<sup>th</sup>, Chapter One pilots once again came through and turned 65 emotionally and psychologically disadvantaged youth into smiling, happy Young Eagles. This is the fifth time that we have flown Young Eagles at Imperial County. The people there love us because they have neither an EAA Chapter nor the pilots who are organized to fly individual kids rather than groups.

Seven Chapter One pilots and Virginia Harmer from Cable Airport were joined by two local pilots, Joel Shank and Jim Piper, for the day's flying. Gerald Perry's nephew Shane Selby flew down with Gerald and did the plane parking. Ron Headlee did the marshalling on the ground, and Greg Younge and his mother Pat did the certificates. Thanks to everyone who made this day one to be remembered for a lifetime.

**- Wes Blasjo**

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