

By the early 1950s, AOPA membership advertisements were regular features of "The AOPA Pilot" section in *Flying* magazine. Only AOPA members received *Flying* with the AOPA insert until AOPA Pilot's independent self-publication in March 1958.

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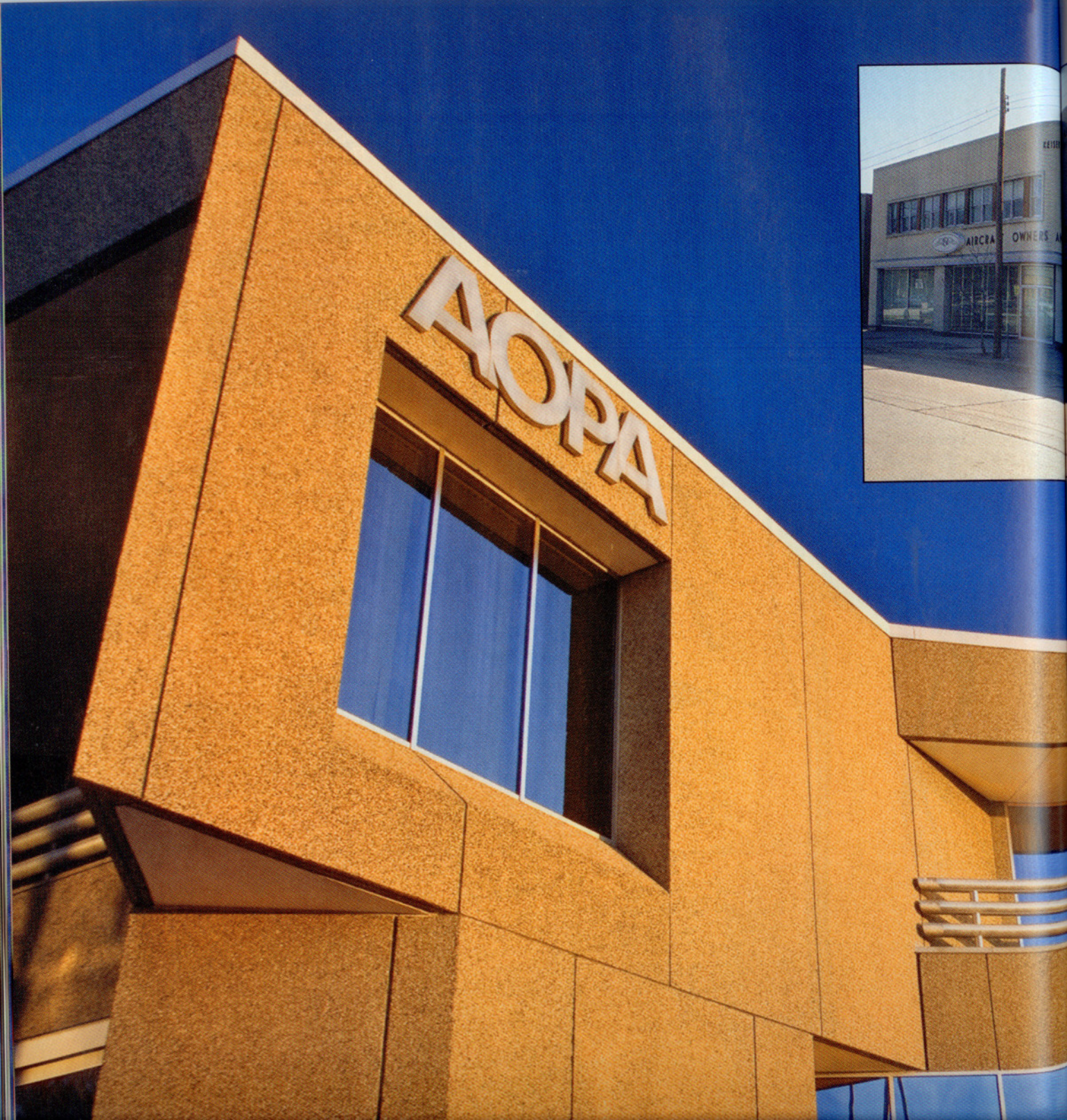
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Phil Boyer  
(1991-2002)





# Seven Zero

How time flies

BY THOMAS A. HORNE

This month marks the seventieth anniversary of AOPA's founding, an event that took place after several aviation-minded Philadelphia lawyers had a discussion during a hunting trip. The conversation centered on general aviation's lack of effective political representation. In fact, at the time general aviation was called "miscellaneous aviation" in government circles. In 1939, several pilot organizations competed for members, but none of them had effective voices at the state or federal level. AOPA founders C. Townsend Ludington, Philip T. and Laurence P. Sharples, J. Story Smith, and Alfred L. Wolf resolved to change that. They got the fledgling AOPA going by hiring its first employee, Joseph B. ("Doc") Hartranft Jr. Previously, Hartranft was president of the National Intercollegiate Flying Club and headed up a flying club at the University of Pennsylvania.

AOPA earned its voice when it made a deal with the Ziff-Davis Publishing Company. The arrangement gave AOPA a section in Ziff-Davis' monthly *Popular Aviation* magazine, the forerunner of today's *Flying* magazine. Other early initiatives helped create legislation that established the Civilian Pilot Training Program. This allowed thousands to earn their pilot certificates in those tough economic times, stimulated general aviation aircraft sales, and boosted flying activity—all the while preparing pilots with the education that would serve the nation so well in our air forces of World War II.

At the same time, AOPA secured a reduction in pilot medical examination fees (from \$10 to \$6) and urged the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) to build more airports to serve general aviation's growing needs. In 1940, AOPA formed the "AOPA Air Guard" to introduce civilian pilots to military rules and procedures; some 5,000 pilots took these courses.

During World War II, there was great pressure to ban all civilian flying. But AOPA convinced the CAA and the military to allow properly registered pilots to fly in all airspace—except for the newly established coastal Air Defense Identifi-

cation Zones. "Keep 'em ALL Flying" said a popular bumper sticker that AOPA handed out in those tumultuous days.

After World War II, general aviation surged in popularity, and AOPA's membership grew with it. By 1946, AOPA had 20,000 members—double the 1940 level. This trend would continue, with membership reaching 80,000 by 1956. By this time, AOPA had fought a battle against a government proposal to mandate heavy, tube-laden communication radios; a compromise required radios in only the busiest airspace. AOPA was central to the testing and evaluation programs for the then-new VOR and ILS, and in establishing a common frequency for pilots to self-announce their positions. We know it today as the *unicom* (for "universal communications") frequency—a term coined by AOPA general manager Max Karant. Karant also served as editor of *The AOPA Pilot*, the new name of the *Flying* insert. Karant would go on to serve as AOPA Pilot's editor for many years, as well in top AOPA executive posts.

The AOPA Air Safety Foundation (ASF) was formed in 1950 to advance general aviation safety. Within a few years, ASF was conducting several courses in ground schools across the United States—the most popular being those that taught basic instrument flying skills, and Pinch-Hitter® courses that taught spouses how to land an airplane in an emergency.

Airline traffic was on the increase in the 1950s. There were proposals to prevent general aviation aircraft from flying to or near large airports served by the airlines, but thanks to AOPA, VFR corridors and reductions in airspace volumes were secured. In the interest of minimizing the chance of midair collisions, maximum airspeeds were also established, with AOPA's guidance. To this day, speed limits live on in Class B, C, and D airspace, as well as below 10,000 feet msl.

In March 1958, AOPA began publishing *AOPA Pilot* as a standalone monthly publication, independent of Ziff-Davis. AOPA's annual *Airports USA* directory of airports would soon follow. In 1962 came another example of AOPA's grow-

AOPA moved to new offices in Bethesda, Maryland (inset) in 1951. But by May 1983, the association was more than ready to move into its newly built headquarters at the Frederick (Maryland) Municipal Airport (left).



ing prominence in general aviation lobbying—that was when the International Council of Aircraft Owner and Pilot Associations (IAOPA) was formed to promote general aviation interests around the world. Today there are 63 nations represented in IAOPA.

Highly publicized midair collisions in the 1960s between general aviation airplanes and airliners brought tremendous pressure to exclude private airplanes from newly created High Density Traffic Zones. Fortunately, AOPA was able to preserve access, and even went on in the 1970s to help design the dimensions of the Terminal Control Areas (TCAs—the precursors of today's Class B airspace) to be more general-aviation-friendly. By 1969 AOPA had grown to 141,000 members—a number that certainly represented the value of AOPA to U.S. pilots.

AOPA would need the clout of its burgeoning membership—245,000 by 1979—to maintain its pressure on government. The Arab oil embargo of 1973 tempted some in government to propose drastic fuel rationing for general aviation. But AOPA was able to avert disaster by preserving an allocation of fuel equal to 75 percent of the pre-embargo amount. Another big issue of the 1970s was the funding of the nation's growing airspace system. The Airport and Airway Development and Revenue Act of 1970 was designed to fund airports and improve airway navigation technology. Instead, much of the money in this aviation trust fund was diverted to day-to-day operation of the FAA, or used as a means of offsetting deficits elsewhere in the federal budget. AOPA protested, but the fight dragged on. An atmosphere of antipathy often pervaded relationships between general aviation and the FAA in the 1970s. FAA Administrator Alexander Butterfield, who first proposed fees for written exams and the issuance of pilot certificates, typified this mood in a 1973 opinion on general aviation access to Class B airspace: "If you ride a bicycle, don't drive on the Beltway."

AOPA's Political Action Committee was formed in 1980 to increase lobbying effectiveness, and it would be needed after the Professional Air Traffic Controllers union (PATCO) strike of August 1981. The FAA wanted to eliminate all general aviation flying after the strike, but AOPA helped work out a flow-control method that allowed IFR flights. Other successes in the 1980s included preventing the closure of 75 flight service stations, the

simplification of TCA boundaries, the imposition of measures that reduced taxes paid into the aviation trust fund whenever expenditures fell below authorized amounts, and preserving access to Boston's Logan International Airport. AOPA argued that inasmuch as all users pay into the federal funds that Logan uses, the airport must remain open to all. An administrative law judge agreed, setting an important precedent.

The late 1990s brought a repetition of many of the same challenges AOPA had been facing from day one. A spate of airport closures—exemplified by the high-profile closing of Chicago's Meigs Field—caused AOPA to create the Airport Support Network (ASN), made up of volunteers at airports across the country serving as an early warning system on the lookout for discrimination against general aviation. Trust fund issues again came to the fore, when AOPA rallied members to write their legislators in favor of adequately funding general aviation airports from the modernization money authorized by the Aviation Investment and Reform Act (AIR-21).

Another victory came in 1994 when AOPA's strong advocacy efforts were rewarded with passage of the General Aviation Revitalization Act. This law freed manufacturers of product liability burdens issuing from lawsuits involving aircraft more than 18 years old—and let manufacturers resume building. Manufacturing had come to a virtual halt in the mid-1980s because of the costs of product liability settlements.

In 1995, AOPA launched its Web site, AOPA Online ([www.aopa.org](http://www.aopa.org)), and began what was to become a tradition of providing high-quality, timely information and services to members via the Internet. In 1999, AOPA furthered this concept with the launch of *ePilot*, a weekly e-mail newsletter. But this wasn't the only new publication in the 1990s. In 1998, AOPA purchased *Flight Training* magazine—an essential vehicle for recruiting new pilots and providing valuable instructional articles for student pilots, instructors, and those seeking aviation careers.

A new century dawned, and with it came the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. AOPA responded by doing what it does best: informing pilots, preventing unnecessary restrictions, defending our right and privilege to fly, and educating the public about how GA serves America every day. AOPA was able to reopen many airports located beneath

## AOPA presidents



C. Townsend Ludington  
(1939-1952)



Joseph B. Hartranft Jr.  
(1952-1977)



John L. Baker  
(1977-1990)



Phil Boyer  
(1991-2008)



Craig Fuller  
(2009-present)



Class B airspace that had been closed in the days after the attacks. To make sure that the resources for these sorts of awareness campaigns are assured, AOPA started the General Aviation Restoration Fund, which raised \$500,000 by the end of 2001.


We'd make use of that, and more, to help carry out such campaigns as the one against user fees. In 2007, the Bush administration proposed user fees as a means of financing the Next Generation (NextGen) air traffic control system. Instead of paying via fuel taxes—the traditional method—user fees would levy administrative fees against pilots for such services as accessing the air traffic system and filing flight plans. AOPA held firm to the fuel-tax payment alternative, and after a long and effective campaign that involved testimony before Congress, public education campaigns, and member activism managed to push the decision into the future. However, recently the battle was renewed again.

The AOPA Foundation was launched in 2008 to address key initiatives to ensure the future of general aviation. Almost immediately after its creation, \$26 million was pledged toward a goal of \$56 million. Part of the AOPA Foundation's funding was put to work right away—creating AOPA's Let's Go Flying program. Let's Go Flying ([www.letsstoflying.org](http://www.letsstoflying.org)) is designed to boost the ranks of student pilots by making general aviation more accessible. The pilot population has gone from a high of 827,000 to today's figure of just under 600,000. AOPA is committed to building up those numbers.

Over the past 70 years, many of the challenges faced by general aviation have repeated themselves: rising costs, airport closures, airspace restrictions, and public misinformation. In the next 70 years AOPA will remain at the forefront of general aviation advocacy as the largest and most effective general aviation organization in the world. It's safe to say that general aviation could not have grown over the years without AOPA's strength. That strength, symbolized by today's 416,000 members, still issues from the kind of enthusiasm, commitment, and imagination that created AOPA in the first place. **AOPA**

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 *See and listen as three AOPA presidents discuss the mission of the association.*  
*[www.aopa.org/pilot/70video](http://www.aopa.org/pilot/70video)*





## Wings Field

The airport where AOPA was born

BY JULIE SUMMERS WALKER



We make quite a scene when we land in the Let's Go Flying Sweepstakes Cirrus SR22, especially at quiet small airports such as Wings Field (LOM) in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. Our plan was to arrive inconspicuously and spend the day at the airport where AOPA was founded, quietly observing a typical day at Wings Field. It's hard to go unnoticed when your aircraft is emblazoned with two-foot-high letters spelling out *Let's Go Flying!*

We were immediately surrounded by instructors and their students, putting off their lessons for a chance to look at AOPA's 2009 sweepstakes airplane. Pilot Dave Hirschman gave the grand tour and answered questions. Photographer Chris Rose immediately hoofed off to begin photographing the Cirrus and the field, and I started playing my role as intrepid reporter, wandering around the field sniff-

ing out a story. I didn't have to go far. I've got a passion for good food and I somehow immediately discovered the kitchen door into the Philadelphia Aviation Country Club where the chef was preparing the day's lunch—yes, that was lobster bisque simmering on the stove.

The Philadelphia Aviation Country Club, a farmhouse on the grounds of 217-acre Wings Field, is the first—and now last—aviation country club in the United States. It's quietly stately, in an oh-so-Main-Line-Philadelphia sort of way. The dining rooms are in the former living areas of the farmhouse and banquet and meeting rooms are upstairs. Historic photos from the country club's heyday adorn the walls. Outside is a swimming pool and tennis court.

In 1939, when AOPA was founded here, aviation and the nation were on the brink of war. But the passion for flying and liv-





AOPA trustee and Wings Field shareholder Paul Heintz came out to his favorite field and posed with the Let's Go Flying Cirrus (above). Montgomery County Aviation owner Tom Dougherty (center at right) showed AOPA's Dave Hirschman (left) and Airport Manager Jay Kontra a trick to the latching system of the SR22's doors.



ing the good life were present. Spending summer days swimming in the pool, picnicking beside the runway, and watching aircraft take off and land must have been gracious living at its best. Today, General Manager Joseph H. Case Jr. oversees a thriving business—there are more than 500 members of the club who pay \$475 yearly to dine and participate in country-club activities. In the 11 years that Case has managed the club, its reputation for fine food and gracious dining has grown. He also repaired the swimming pool and is in the process of enclosing the sun porch with removable windows. Enclosing the porch will make airplane spotting more enjoyable when the wind is up.

#### 'We're a little family here'

FBO Owner Tom Dougherty is a little surprised when we show up in his han-

gar. His hands are covered in paint and Airport Manager Jay Kontra is holding the culprit, a spray gun with a blocked valve. This is a typical day at Montgomery County Aviation—or maybe it's atypical. Basically, Dougherty says, every day is something new coupled with the same old thing. "We deal with hangar doors breaking, airport issues such as noise, aircraft repairs, and our flight school—we have eight instructors," Dougherty rattles off. "We're one operation inside of four."

Dougherty once owned the largest Mobil service station in the country. When he sold it, he tried retirement. You don't have to spend much time with this man to know that he wouldn't do retirement well. "I got bored," he says. "But now there's too much to do here." His wife Diane works in the flight school, which is five times busier now than when Dougherty came six years ago. "We went from four aircraft to 17. We have a student base of 2,000. We have 140 based aircraft and have expanded from a 2,675-foot runway to 3,700 feet. We're busy."

It's a kind of busy Dougherty and Kontra obviously thrive on. Kontra is on the job just as much as Dougherty, usually early morning to mid-evening. And Kontra's seen a lot of change at Wings Field; he's been working here in some capacity for 17 years. "We're a little family here. We're a team," he says.

"Energy is the key," adds Dougherty. "People want to be taken care of. Our people know what the customer means to their pay."

#### Saving an airport

In 1994 Paul Heintz drove around the airport he'd called home for more than 40 years taking photographs. "I thought it would be the last time I saw it as an airport," he says. Wings Field's then owners no longer had an interest in running it

## Aero Club of Pennsylvania

On December 17, 1909, Arthur T. Atherholt, the first licensed balloonist in Pennsylvania, assembled 14 Philadelphians with the plans to form a new aviation organization. The Aero Club of Pennsylvania was formed with the merger of the Aero Club of Philadelphia, the Ben Franklin Aeronautical Society, the Aeronautical Recreational Society, and the Ben Franklin Balloon Association. The club's original logo depicted a witch on a broomstick portraying the general public's belief that aviation required trickery and witchcraft.

In its promotional brochure in 1909, *Solving the Problem of the Air*, the club explained that it formed "with no qualification other than a curiosity to find out how the aviators of the world were accomplishing the wonderful things they saw constantly recorded in the newspapers...to become enthusiasts, completely captured by the fascinations of the most entrancing science in the world."

Celebrating its 100th anniversary, the Aero Club of Pennsylvania is the oldest active incorporated organization of its kind in the United States. The club was instrumental in establishing the first training site for pilots in the first World War; was active in opening Philadelphia's first air mail service; and was instrumental in the establishment of Philadelphia International Airport. Members of the club over the years have included the founders of both Eastern Air Lines and USAir; founders of AOPA and Wings Field; and the first commandant of the Naval Aviation School in Pensacola.

A celebration of the anniversary will be held in December and will feature airline captain Connie Tobias, the first woman to successfully fly an exact replica of the 1903 Wright Flyer. The 1909 Wright Flyer simulator will also be featured at the event. For more information, contact Nancy Kyle (nkyle111@comcast.net).

—JSW



as an airport, and encroaching development around the 217 acres was tempting. The owners asked \$10 million for the property. Heintz, a lawyer and AOPA trustee, organized a group of local pilots to attempt to raise the money to buy their beloved airport. They first approached the businesses that were using Wings Field as a base of operations for their corporate helicopters—Aetna US Health Care, Merck, and Unisys. Aetna ultimately provided \$3 million and Merck and Unisys \$1.5 million. Then individual tenants were approached and eventually Wings Field was sold to Wings Field Preservation Associates L.P.; its 60 shareholders own the airport to this day.

Dougherty is one of those shareholders, and Heintz credits him with a significant accomplishment—“This is the first time in its history that Wings Field is self-sustaining,” says Heintz.

### **Weather coming in**

Montgomery County Aviation has purchased several Cirrus aircraft to round out its flight school operation and is ordering more. Dougherty is a big fan of the Cirrus design. In fact, as Hirschman returns to transport us back to Frederick, Maryland (a 37-minute flight), Dougherty jumps in the SR22 and the two “talk Cirrus.”

As our Cirrus fans sit on the apron, one of the three Eclipse 500 jets owned by charter company Blue Bell Air, LLC lands. Just as Wings Field in its heyday was the spot for everything new in aviation, today’s new very light jet design—and the many Cirrus airplanes tied down—continue to mark this field as a leader. Blue Bell pilot Jack Lawrence bounds into the small Wings terminal with enthusiasm. The business is doing quite well based at Wings and Lawrence sees nothing but positive things for the future—even though Blue Bell Air bought three new Eclipses just last year and the aircraft manufacturer faces liquidation.

It’s the first day of spring here at Wings but it’s snowing. Traffic has been sparse all day. It’s time for us to leave. As usual the Let’s Go Flying Cirrus gets looks as we taxi out. Heintz has told us that it’s often hard to get an IFR departure clearance from Wings by radio and, sure enough, Hirschman has to pick it up with his cell phone. Once airborne, we glance back at Wings Field and see not just a historic airport, but the possibilities of the future. **AOPA**

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