

A story about a legend in flight training: Tom Murphy

Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation

May, June 2021 Newsletter

Editor: Fred Coste Volume 6, Issue 3

Editor's Note:

I have frequently asked various readers of our newsletter if they would jot down the particulars about their aviation related experiences. I usually get a response along the lines of: "I'm not that interesting," or "I don't really have any good stories to tell." Heck, I've sat through enough hangar flying sessions to know that isn't true! I'm pleased to tell you that I finally have a taker for this standing invitation!

Paul Farber has given his time to tell the story of his friendship with a local Aviation Legend. Tom Murphy is known to many pilots across the nation. His influence has reached far beyond Bayport Aerodrome and Coram Airpark and we are pleased to share Paul's remembrance of Tom Murphy.

Flying with The Boss

By Paul Farber

My good friend for many years, Tom Murphy, passed away in 1996. We called Tom "The Boss" because whenever he told us to do something, we did it! Tom has been such a great influence on my life that I thought I would share some of my memories of him.

Tom was born in 1910; he had been flying since 1929 and flew until the last two weeks of his life. Before Tom learned how to fly, he had won a scholarship to Juilliard as a violinist and also played with the New York Philharmonic. I first met Tom in 1984 when I was a 22 year old

pilot who thought he knew a lot. I had been flying Cessna's out of Republic Airport on Long Island, New York and was looking for some Cub time. I was recommended to Tom who ran a small flying school with two Cubs, a PA-11 and a PA-18 as well as a Waco UPF that he was flying out of a small 2600-foot long grass field called Bayport Aerodrome (23N) located on Long Island.



When I wandered onto the airport and asked for Tom, I was directed to an old 1968 Dodge parked on the flight line. There was an old man sitting behind the wheel of the car, wearing a tie and reading *Flying* magazine. The back of the car was filled with airplane parts and tools. When I asked him if he would check me out in the Cub, he hesitantly agreed.

As the engine was warming up, I asked Tom at what speed I should lift the airplane off; a basic bit of knowledge I thought, since it was something I had been taught by all my other flight instructors. Tom said to me, "Don't tell me you're one of *those* pilots! You don't have to look at the air speed indicator; the airplane will tell you when it's ready to fly."



Paul Farber and Tom Murphy

After that first hour with Tom, I realized how little I had actually learned in the past. I also realized how special Tom was. He had the smoothest touch of any pilot I'd ever flown with. It seemed like the controls never moved; the ball was always centered. Tom had the patience of a saint and the personality of a little boy who never grew up. I looked forward to my weekly lesson, after which we would sit in Tom's car talking while he waited for another student to arrive. Tom told me: "You can learn a lot from watching other airplanes take off and land." Tom was at the airport seven days a week, 365 days a year often flying for as much as eight hours a day. He would kid me, saying that he was at the lowest point of his professional flying career. "I'm just a lowly flight instructor. This is a form of purgatory, you know - being a flight instructor, at least I'll go to heaven when I die."

On rainy days, Tom worked in a hangar recovering a plane or fixing something on his own plane. His work was always

meticulous. A master mechanic who could fix anything, Tom would say, "Let's fix it ourselves." We talked while he worked. He once told me: "You can always teach someone a job, however you can't teach pride." Tom would say in jest: "I can fix anything, but I just can't make a living."

He had an ability to judge the health of an airplane with his fine-tuned ear. I was at the field one day in Bayport when a Waco UPF7 was doing takeoffs and landings. When the plane landed, Tom spoke with the pilot and told him, "You better get rid of that prop. It's going to let go someday. I can hear it vibrating on takeoff." Of course, the pilot just laughed and ignored Tom's advice. Sure enough, it wasn't long before the propeller broke off in flight. The pilot managed to set the airplane down on a golf course. The violent vibration ripped three of the engine mounts free and had broken the main wing spars. The airplane was a total wreck!

When flying with Tom, if your last landing was not perfect he would say, "We're not quitting on that one. Let's do another." Tom once said to me, while we were turning base to final: "Don't hold that rudder as we made our right turn otherwise the next stop is Gutterman's funeral home." If you were getting a little low on final, he would say, "That is about as low as you would want to go." If everything was perfect, he would say, "Hold what you got." To help you understand a point he was making, he would draw on your back as if it were a

blackboard. If you flew for an hour and fifteen minutes, Tom would charge you for an hour flight.



Skywriting for Pepsi Cola

As we became more friendly, I learned that he had been an original Pepsi Cola skywriter pilot working with Andy Stinis, flying out of Roosevelt Field. Tom started skywriting in 1937 and was also a civilian flight instructor for the Navy in N3N's flying out of Floyd Bennet field. Tom used to travel all around the country, skywriting. He and Andy would do some sky writing at the Cleveland air races and knew all the great pilots of that era. I asked about Amelia Earhart, to which he responded that they were a snooty bunch who kept to themselves. Tom was also good friends with some well known pilots: Al Williams, Jessie Bistrow, Cutis Pitts and Douglas (Wrong-way) Corrigan. Tom thought Al Williams was the greatest pilot of his time. Jessie Bistrow had a Curtiss Hawk in which had an engine failure when he was flying to Cuba for an air show. He told Tom, "I've only cried twice in my life: My mother's funeral and when the tail of the

hawk disappeared beneath the ocean's waves." Tom was also at Floyd Bennett Field talking to Douglas Corrigan before he took off on his "wrong way flight."

In 1939, there was a controversy on what to name New York City's new public airport. It was Tom and Andy Stinis who flew over the field and, in sky writing, wrote, "Name it LaGuardia Airport" Tom could write an entire letter in script backwards and then hold it up in a mirror and read it. Tom and Andy would travel the country skywriting. Tom's father, who was also a master mechanic, would follow them in a Black Buick that was filled with airplane parts and tools. Tom painted a big "X" on the roof of the car so they could spot it from the air.



More info, click: [FITZMAURICE FLYING FIELD | Massapequa, NY Patch](#)

Tom also owned Fitzmaurice Flying Field in Massapequa. He was forced to sell the field in 1953, so a school could be built there. Tom had a photographic memory and could remember conversations and events like it happened yesterday. He could also remember the N numbers of all

the different airplanes he had owned. Every now and then, I would show Tom a picture of an airplane in a magazine and Tom would say, "Oh, that's one of my old airplanes." Tom once owned the Waco that held the all-time altitude record.



An SE5

When Tom first started skywriting, he used an SE5, which is now in the Shuttleworth Collection in England. The travel air he used is now hanging in the Smithsonian. Tom said, "He must've written 'Pepsi Cola' 10,000 times in that plane." Sometimes Tom and Andy would play tic-tac-toe before they started skywriting a message. During the war, Tom was a civilian flight instructor at Ballinger Field in Texas.



Andy Stinis and Tom Murphy

After the war, Tom and Andy resumed the skywriting business. It was Tom's idea to pick up some surplus T-6's and try them for skywriting. Out of all the T-6's,



Skywriting – as opposed to - Sky typing



Tom thought the SNJ-2 was the best because they held the most gas, 190 gallons, and also had the lowest time. That was because at the beginning of the war, some cadets landed them wheels up. Since the SNJ-2's had their gas tanks in the center section, they caught on fire very easily. The navy decided that the 2's would not be used for flight training anymore.

Tom said that most of the SNJ's only had about 300 hours when they acquired them for \$1,200; "Imagine that, acquiring airplanes that were like brand new." He

also used a Douglas SBD Dauntless for a year to skywrite. Tom said the Dauntless flew just like a T-6, however with its two-stage blower, he could go up to 21,000 feet. He used to tell me the biggest complaint with the airplane was the landing gear handle was on the right side and you would have to switch hands to raise the gear. However, the T-6's were more economical, so they sold the Dauntless. Tom and Andy continued skywriting until 1952 when the contract was abruptly cancelled due to the popularity of television. Skywriting was considered to be an antique form of advertising. That's when Andy got the idea of sky typing which looks more modern. He got the idea from the Times Square Sign in New York City. Since sky typing only required formation flying, Tom's pay was greatly reduced, so he went back to flight instructing.

One day when sitting with Tom we had a conversation that changed my life forever. Tom said, "You know if you ever buy an airplane make sure it's different." Tom used to like to joke that your grandmother could fly the modern airplanes that were being made today. When I asked him which plane he thought I should buy, he told me to get a T-6. The gear comes up, it has a constant speed prop and it's fast. He would say, "You'll be in a different class. Once you get them running good all you need is oil and gas. You'll never wear that plane out." I asked Tom when was the last time that he flew one.

He said it was about 30 years ago. When I then asked if he thought he could still fly one, he laughed and poked his finger into my chest. He said, "Buddy I got so many hours in one, I used to look like one. You buy it and I'll teach you to fly it." Well, before long I was subscribing to Trade-A-Plane looking for a T-6. Unfortunately, they were out of my price range. Then there was a Harvard IV T-6 for sale in Atlanta for \$15,000 less than the going price. I didn't even know what a Harvard was but the owner said it flew fine. He picked it up from a bank that had foreclosed on the airplane and was now looking to sell it. When I told Tom about the airplane he said, "Before you buy it, go down to Atlanta and get a ride in the plane. You may not even like the way it flies. Only buy it if the owner is willing to deliver the ship to New York. If he doesn't have the confidence to fly it up here, don't buy it." Well, after getting my first ride in the T-6 and the owner agreed to deliver the ship to New York, I bought the airplane.



Paul & Tom with Paul's T-6

Eight months later, after borrowing from two friends and taking an advance on my credit card, I had enough money to pay for the T-6. Tom told me to ride up with the fellow and see how he flew it. The date was Sunday, October 10, 1987. The ferry flight was uneventful and six hours later we were back in New York. We landed at 6:30 just as the sun was setting. Tom was the only one waiting for us at the airport. After stretching our legs, Tom told the pilot to start the airplane and park it in his parking spot. However, the engine would not start. Tom motioned me over and said, "Would you please tell that jackass to throw the mixture ahead before the starter burns out." After I told the pilot, the engine instantly roared to life. Tom said that the plane looked okay, but he could hear the valves clanking. The following week I came out all ready to fly the ship, but the battery was stone dead. Tom laughed and said that just about every plane he had ever bought came with a dead battery. Tom informed me that after looking over the log books that very little maintenance had been done over the last ten years. All it had was the stamp stating, "This plane is airworthy." Sometimes, the plane didn't fly for over two years and it seemed it had six prior owners in the past ten years. Tom told me never to go by the log books alone. "No one enters what really happens to these planes and how many hours are on the engine." He started laughing, "Paulie, if you ever saw what these planes have been through, you'd never get into one." Ten

days later my battery arrived, but Tom had difficulty starting the engine. When he finally got it going and taxied the airplane, we learned the ship had no brakes!

As Tom looked at the engine and found it had only four primer lines hooked up, instead of the usual five. Tom used to say, "Your engine is so old it has whiskers on it." In the meantime, another one of Tom's students and a good friend of mine, Mike McMahon, saw my T-6 on the flight line. He also wanted to buy a T-6. With Tom's blessing, Mike did just that.

Six months later, Mike's T-6 arrived from California. Tom started finding a lot of discrepancies with that T-6 also. Now we had two T-6's at the airport and neither of them was able to fly. Tom would never promise when we would get to fly the T-6s. He said, "Well now that we have fixed this one discrepancy, maybe we should look at the fuel selector valve. It sure feels stiff. What do you think?" Of course, when we took it apart the cork was gouged out.

By now everyone at the airport was saying that Tom was scared to fly the T-6 and he never thought we would actually go out and buy them. One day I asked Tom about the rumor and he said, "Why fly it if it is not right? What's the rush? The problem with you guys is you have never seen one of these crack up, like I have and smelled burning human flesh. You'll never forget that. I'll fly it when I'm good and ready." Well, that shut me up.

The months went by and we started running out of things to fix. Tom explained that he would only fly it with a north wind since there were no houses directly off the north runway. Thirteen months after the



ship first flew in, Tom thought that she was ready. Now we just had to wait for a north wind. Finally, two weeks later on a Wednesday there was a light breeze out of the north. Tom finally said we could fly it and I started pre-flighting the T-6. Tom came over to me and said, "Kid, you've got your entire life in front of you, let me fly it around a little bit and see how it's running and then we will fly it together." I told Tom that I thought it was running well and I would like to ride with him. He hesitated and finally agreed. When I gave him the headset so we could talk, he asked, "What are these for?" Before I could answer him, he said, "There's only one thing I want to

hear and that's the engine running, get rid of these.”

We took off and after leaving the pattern, Tom started doing wing overs and lazy eights. Everything worked fine except for the air speed indicator, which read 40 mph no matter what. On final, Tom pulled back gently on the stick two or three times then maintained our approach. Tom 3 pointed the T-6 and landed it as short as a Cub. The crowd that had gathered to watch was shocked to see a T-6 land so short. Tom said, “Any field you can fly a Cub out of, you can fly this airplane out of.” When I asked him what he was doing with the stick on final, he explained that’s how you know if you have the right air speed. If you pull back and the airplane sinks, you're going too slow. If the plane ever starts sinking it's always the throttle, never the stick. The throttle is your best friend. As we started flying the ship more, Tom explained to me that the best way to bring the ship into a small field; “Slow it up to 100 mph and drop the gear, test the brakes, then 10 degrees of flaps, fly downwind at 90 mph with 20 degrees of flaps, on base add another 10 degrees and full flaps right before turning final, maintain 80 mph on final, on ¼ of a mile or less on final throw the prop ahead, “By following this procedure we would come in nice and quiet.”

On take off, Tom would use 20 degrees of flaps. As we would break ground, he would tap the brakes lightly and gear up. At the end of the runway, he would reduce the

power back to 30 inches then bring the prop back to 2000 RPM. Then he would climb 80-85mph. At 300 feet, slowly he would start milking up the flaps at 5 degree increments while holding up the nose a little more to offset the loss of lift. When the flaps were fully up, he would power back to 25 inches and 1850 RPM.



At the beginning, Tom put me in the back seat until I got familiar with the characteristics of the T-6. Eventually, he put me in the front seat. After Tom checked me out, he showed me wing overs, rolls and aerobatics. Tom believed that a T-6 was a little too heavy for teaching aerobatics and liked doing them in the Stearman better. Tom used to say that the Stearman lost all performance after an altitude of 10 feet. He always said some crooked politician got the contract for Boeing during World War II. In the heat of Texas, it took 30 minutes to get up to altitude in a Stearman, then you had 10 to 15 minutes for maneuvers and 30 minutes to get down to the field. Tom was an unbelievable aerobatic pilot. He once performed 27 continuous turning rolls. Tom would say, “Fly the airplane like a ballerina; gracefully” or “Fly the T-6 like a

sports car.” Once before a flight, we were getting ready to fly and it had rained the night before. Tom said to me, “Hey Paulie, my seat cushion is wet, it’s not too bad but let’s change it. If we crash and they pull me out, they’ll say, ‘Hey, this old kook pissed in his pants’ and I don’t want anyone saying that about me.” On another occasion, we went out to fly the T-6 and the battery was dead. I started to get out of the airplane to put the covers back on. Tom in his usual “little boy” manner said, “Let’s just sit in the airplane for fifteen minutes and pretend we are flying anyway.”

Once we were getting low on fuel, so I switched tanks. About five minutes later, I looked at the tachometer and it started to fluctuate. At the same time the engine started sputtering and coughing. Tom’s voice came over the intercom, “Paulie, the engine is quitting, it’s not getting gas. Switch tanks.” The engine instantly roared back to life. I was shaking like a leaf. I told Tom that I had switched tanks five minutes ago. He said that we should check the screens on the carburetor when we land.

After checking them (they were all clean), he said that we should get over the airport before switching tanks. We flew over the airport for fifteen minutes switching tanks and the engine never missed a beat. Finally, Tom said, “You never click the fuel valve in the detent all the way. When you switch tanks always keep your hand on the fuel selector valve. If the engine quits that’s the first thing to do, switch tanks,

and never switch tanks on the ground. You never want it quitting on takeoff. Tom always believed in doing the checklist out loud. He said even if you fly solo, always keep the same routine. By saying it out loud, you won’t forget anything. Once I asked Tom if he wanted to go to a local air show. He told me that he’s seen the greatest pilots in the world up until they had killed themselves. “I have no desire to see airplanes doing aerobatics near the ground.”

I once asked Randy Davis if Tom had ever changed over all these years. He chuckled and said, “Not one bit. I’ll never forget the first time I soloed. I was flying with Tom and he came over the intercom and said ‘You’re flying very well, I think you’re ready to solo.’ I didn’t answer him. He kept on nodding his head up and down motioning me to agree with him. So I said. ‘Yes Tom, I’m ready.’ After we landed, he got out of the airplane and walked away. Just before I started to taxi back to the runway, he motioned to me to wait one minute. He walked over to the airplane and said, ‘By the way, I forgot to tell you one thing. Whatever you do, don’t “F” it up. Now go have fun.’” Tom’s mantra was just enjoy the beauty of flight.

After flying the T-6 for a year, Tom suggested we top the engine. He installed new pistons, rings, valves, harness, mags and pushrods. Six months later, we flew and everything was fine. I told him that it was hard to believe that all those individual engine parts I had been holding

in my hands just a short while ago were now all working together to make the engine run. It is a little scary when you think that they are now moving thousands of times each hour. Tom told me that there is much more than that to an engine.

“Believe me, I understand how everything works on your entire engine. Imagine if you understood how your body worked, you’d be scared to get out of bed in the morning.”

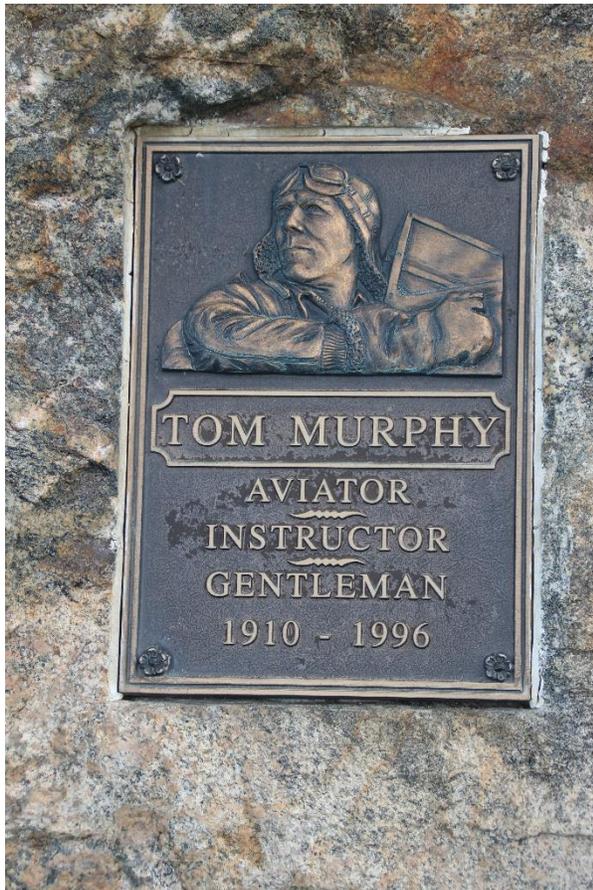
Unfortunately, in 1995, Tom was diagnosed with cancer. Throughout chemo therapies and two operations, Tom continued to fly. Tom’s last flight was in a Yak 52. Two weeks later, Tom passed away. It was 1996 and Tom was 86 years old. The wake, funeral, and memorial services were crowded, especially with old-time pilots. Some of Tom’s former students came from as far as California. Tom had flown from 1929 to 1996, a staggering sixty seven years. He had well over fifty thousand hours and it seemed like he could remember every one of them. He used to say, “I never put one scratch on an airplane.” A number of people have thought about writing a biography for this great pilot, great flight instructor, and even greater person. They became discouraged when Tom refused to talk about himself. He was humble and so much more than a great pilot.

Thanks to Tom and his mentoring with the T-6, a whole new world opened for me just because I owned a warbird. Soon after Tom’s death, The American Airpower

Museum opened at Republic Airport and I was invited to display the T-6 as part of their collection for 19 years. When the Jones Beach Airshow was created, I got to participate in it for 15 years. I was fortunate enough to meet so many amazing people and world class pilots and I have made lifelong friends. However, when I compare Tom to all these amazing pilots, I realized that Tom was the cream of the crop.

I feel as though I have come full circle with the T-6, as I now hangar it at the Long Island Early Fliers hangar at Bayport Aerodrome. Even though Tom is gone now, I still hear his voice giving me advice. I feel so lucky to have had such a warm and special person in my life. There will never be another Tom Murphy!





The Tom Murphy Memorial at the Long Island Early Fliers hangar at Bayport Aerodrome

For more about Tom Murphy, through home video, please click on this video link:

<https://youtu.be/9p8V9NihRv8>

*******LIEFC News*******

The first LIEF meeting of the new year was a great success. After an update of all of the progress made in the museum during the winter months by President Mark Loiacono, we had a very interesting presentation by John Schulz about the Scottish Bulldog, an aircraft owned by John & Pat Peyton that is being temporarily

stored in the LIEF hangar. Both John & Pat had planned to do the presentation together, however, Pat was on the flight schedule and had to work that weekend.



Though originally built in Great Britain by Beagle Aircraft, the plane became the trainer of choice for the Swedish Airforce and was ultimately deployed to several air forces throughout the world for training as well as attack aircraft.



New plantings:

We recently planted a line of 11 Leyland Cyprus trees behind our hangar building on Town property. This type of tree tends to grow both tall and wide and it is hoped that this will provide us with some privacy and better aesthetics, while providing

some sound deadening to the neighborhood behind us. Also, behind our hangar, we have strengthened the location of our cesspool cover which was necessary because it had been displaced several times when attendees of BAS meetings would park in that area.

Our new office

The trustees have dedicated a portion of the hangar mezzanine for the purpose of organizing and protecting items of a business nature for our organization. It also provides an area for small confidential meetings, protecting membership data and information, centralizing a computer network with Internet access for research of information and storage of items of special interest prior to being displayed to the public.

Future activities

The Board of Trustees continues to monitor opportunities to again begin bus trips to interesting locations. We will keep you posted as to when our popular bus trips will begin again. Everything is dependent upon availability of bus transportation, hotel accommodations and willingness of locations to accept group visitation. More to come!

A Special THANK YOU! To all those who have sent in donations along with paying their membership dues: (The list has grown since our last issue)

1). Mark Loiacono	\$115.00
2). Pat Gallagher	\$165.00
3). Jerry Monacchio	\$ 65.00
4) Lenny & Pat Ohlsson	\$ 50.00
5). Stanley Kalemaris	\$ 65.00
6). Randy Davis	\$500.00
7). Peter Borneman	\$ 65.00
8). George Bowen	\$ 15.00
9). Michael Scott	\$ 65.00
10). Rob Lamanna	\$ 15.00
11). Frank Martucci	\$100.00
12). Louis Urciuoli	\$100.00
13). Eric Sandberg	\$ 65.00
14). Jason McMunn	\$ 65.00
15). Fred Katterman	\$500.00
16). Herb Jacobs	\$ 65.00
17). Lee & Lucille Shaw	\$100.00
18). John Sandhaas	\$ 35.00

Every dollar we receive goes toward supporting the work of the Early Fliers and maintaining our museum. This year we are more appreciative than ever, as we have been unable to hold our regular activities due to COVID -19 and all the government restrictions associated with the pandemic.

Thank you all for your generosity!

Your donations are tax deductible!!

Time to smile.....

Day 18 of lock down. Filled the dog with helium.

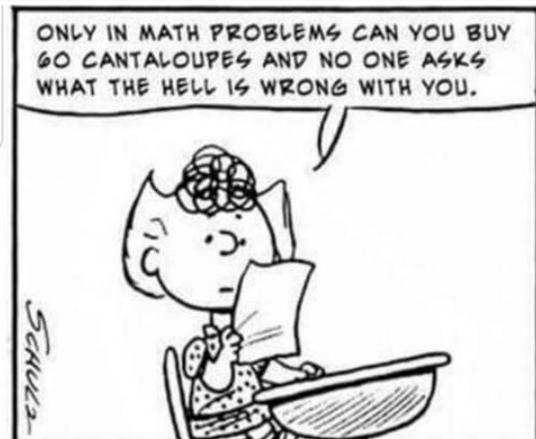


The dog is helping the beggar to attract people, but the Cat is overreacting...



You people need to go back to work.

made with mematic



Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation

Bayport Aerodrome,
Bayport, NY



P.O. Box 43, Holbrook, NY
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www.liefef.org

Membership Application

Name: _____

Annual Dues*

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Individual membership: \$35.00

Family membership: \$50.00

Email: _____

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Occupation: _____

Individual ___ Family ___ Membership

Names of family members joining: _____

Background information: (Please check all that apply)

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Model Builder	Commercial Pilot	Aviation mechanic	
History Buff	Airline Pilot	Aircraft owner	
Computer technician	Enjoy writing	Enjoy photography	

I, _____, being interested in the preservation of all facets of aviation history, particularly that pertaining to Long Island's aviation heritage, do hereby apply for membership in the Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation.

(signature)

(date)

The Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation. is a non-profit organization, founded in 1956 and chartered by the New York State Education Department. It is dedicated to recording, preserving and disseminating information about aviation and Long Island's Aviation Heritage.

Donations of cash and aviation artifacts are tax deductible and always appreciated.

Donations of your time and talent are also gratefully accepted.

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Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation is a non-profit organization founded in 1956 and Chartered by the New York State Education Department. We are dedicated to aviation education and preserving Long Island's aviation heritage. Volunteers who want to help educate and preserve our history are always welcome. Annual Membership in our organization is \$35.00 for individuals; \$50.00 for families.

Donations of aviation memorabilia, aircraft and aircraft parts, aviation clothing, display quality models and items of historic significance are always welcome and greatly appreciated.

Cash donations, as well as artifact donations are tax deductible. You may visit our facility at Bayport Aerodrome, Vitamin Drive, Bayport New York most Wednesdays between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Appointments are necessary as airports are secure locations and can also be arranged at other times for your convenience. Contact us at: L.I.E.F.E.F., P.O. Box 43, Holbrook, NY, 11741 or call (631)-523-5407 (Fred Coste) or fax: 631-588-2147

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