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A Vital Resource for Area Aviators

Fascination with flying comes to some at a very young age.

James Moon, current president, joined the Allegany Flying Club (AFC) in 1990 when he was 19, but his affinity for flying far pre-dated his club membership. He says he cannot remember a time when he wasn't interested in planes. As a small boy, he ran outside whenever a plane flew over. At around age seven, he went on a flight that he still recalls vividly today. James and his father flew in a friend's small plane, landed on a grassy strip, and ate breakfast at Bulls Restaurant, a diner perched on the edge of the strip. He was hooked. When a friend gave him a gift of a half hour of flying for his seventeenth birthday, he began earning enough money that he could continue on his own, or as he calls it, "work and fly, work and fly." James joined the AFC and qualified as a pilot in 1991.

As a child, AFC secretary Garth Nasser's interest in flying was ignited by NASA's space shuttle program and movies like *Top Gun*. He lived in Wiley Ford, West Virginia, near the Kelly-Springfield planes that were used for travel between corporate locations, and he frequently rode his bike to watch from the hillside as the planes lifted off and landed. One day a mechanic motioned him over and let him sit in the cockpit. When the pilots came out, they offered to take Garth on a flight. He enthusiastically accepted and became a passenger on a trip that went from Cumberland to Philadelphia to Akron and then to Pittsburgh. When they reached Pittsburgh, there was a delay, and Garth had to call his mother, who had no idea where he was, to explain why he would be late for dinner. This unexpected trip amplified his desire to be a pilot, but he had to wait until he was an adult to be able to pay for training.



Left group (left to right): Lissa Klueter, Dave Gangler, Brian Thoerig (Treasurer), Dave Topper (Maintenance Officer), James Harsh, James Moon (President), Michael Fitch (Instructor Pilot/Safety Officer), and Richard Kasecamp.

Right group (left to right): Daniel Ruth, Garth Nasser (Secretary), David Boch (former Vice President), Aom Theematananun, Roy Holler, Brian Brinsfield (Instructor Pilot), and Edward Kelly (2G4 Garrett County Airport Manager).

Treasurer Brian Thoerig, who grew up in Mount Savage, Maryland, recalls watching airplanes overhead from the time he was a small child. It wasn't until he was 29, after stints in the U.S. Army and college, that he pursued flying. He had no idea there was a flying club in the area; he located a flight school in Hagerstown and arranged to take lessons there. When his flight instructor cancelled the lesson, he drove home, got a cup of coffee, and browsed through the Cumberland paper, where he noticed a small ad that read, "Learn to fly." Brian contacted the instructor,



who was local, and through this instructor learned about the Allegany Flying Club.

For some people, aviation begins purely as a recreational pastime.

The Allegany Flying Club's vice president Mike Bachert had been interested in flying as a young man, but he was too busy building a construction firm to pursue it. His wife decided he worked too much and needed a relaxing hobby, so she bought curriculum materials and some lessons for him as a gift. He joined the AFC and became a pilot. Soon, he had an opportunity to fly for a private owner who could no longer fly himself. This grew into a full service management company for individual plane owners that has eclipsed his construction business and fully occupied Mike for more than a decade. Though aircraft management can be demanding and time-consuming, his love for flying and the pleasure he derives from seeing his clients benefit from corporate aircraft make it satisfying

work. Mike credits the AFC with giving him the foundation he needed to do what he is doing now.

No matter how enamored young people are with flying, most families do not have the means to provide their children with flying lessons. Many teenagers smitten with flying have to work for the money to join a flying club and get the training and air time they need. Likewise, adults who want to take up aviation have difficulty finding extra money after attending to family finances.

It can also be a challenge for both students and adults to find the time, the helpful mentorship of experienced pilots, and competent instruction, not to mention access to planes they can fly. In the region around Cumberland, the Allegany Flying Club provides an affordable and convenient way to pursue an interest in aviation.

Garth didn't have the 20/20 vision required to become an Air Force pilot, so he worked for the railroad and volunteered for the fire department. When he did eventually find that magic combination of spare hours and dollars, his first attempt at learning was "absolutely miserable." A few years later, after a pause to welcome a child into the family, he tried again, this time finding a great instructor. Both times, he joined the AFC in order to fly their planes and have some help with the learning process.

After working all over the world in several pursuits—builder, helicopter mechanic, helicopter pilot, flight instructor—James Moon took a job with the Maryland State Police as a civilian helicopter pilot engaged in search and rescue, medical evacuations, and law enforcement. Being back in the area allowed him to return to the same club where he started his flying career. Today the Allegany Flying Club occupies the second floor of the hangar next to Trooper 5, where he works.

James' two sons have logged a lot of hours as passengers and plan to qualify as pilots when they're old enough. Garth Nasser's son has been bitten by the flying bug too. Their familiarity with the Allegany Flying Club will be a distinct advantage.

Though the AFC is not a flight school, being in the club has substantial benefits for those who want to learn to fly. In addition to affordable access to small planes, members will find help with ground training and qualified instructors who can help with practical training. The skill sets of members range from novice to experienced professional. Those with no or little experience will find helpful mentors in the club. Mike Fitch, Chief Instructor/Safety Officer, assists new members in getting through the "on-boarding"

process quickly; he connects them with an instructor if this is needed, and makes sure they are checked out in the planes so they can start or continue their training, or just get back to flying.

It would be difficult to find a more economical option than the non-profit Allegany Flying Club. Members pay \$550 as a one-time initiation fee, \$50 per month for membership, and \$80 per logged hour to use one of the club's three planes "wet" (fuel included). Only members can use the club's planes; they are not rented out to non-members. The AFC has three four-passenger planes, one at Garrett Airport in McHenry, Maryland, for aviators closer to that part of the state, and two at the Cumberland Regional Airport. AFC's Dave Topper manages the process of keeping the club planes well-maintained and operational.

Long-time AFC members recall aviators like Gene Light, treasurer for over a quarter century, who made major contributions to the club in the past. Current officers James Moon, Mike Bachert, Garth Nasser, Brian Thoerig, Mike Fitch, Dave Topper, and others clearly "have a heart" for the AFC. They feel a responsibility to carry forward the legacy of leaders like Gene. As Brian says, they want to ensure that the club still exists in a hundred years. To this end,

they happily put in the hours and effort to strengthen the club that helped them fulfill their dreams of flying.

The club seeks to continually expand opportunities for its members. The website has been updated; it is easy to communicate with leaders and to find application materials and other information. Accounting work has been computerized. The meeting schedule has been increased from quarterly to monthly; seminars and activities are offered, and refreshments are an added bonus.

Club officers encourage all members to attend meetings of interest, get to know some of the other members, book the planes, and get into the air. It's an easy flight to many wonderful destinations—Mike mentions the Bahamas, Key West, Myrtle Beach, and Ocean City—and sharing the jaunt with others makes it even more affordable.

The AFC also welcomes all interested parties to learn more. Consult the website (<https://afc-cbe.com/> or call **240-580-0941**) and ask questions. You are sure to receive a quick and friendly response.

The Allegany Flying Club was founded in 1962 as a way to make flying accessible and affordable for residents of the area around Cumberland, Maryland. Nearly fifty years later, the club still strives to fulfill the same mission.

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