

Kitsap ARCS: A Growing Legend in the Far West

By Bill Bambrick

It all started thirty-six years ago when a few RC-minded enthusiasts got tired of hauling their models to distant airfields. Why not start our own club? someone wondered. The rest is history. And what a colorful history it is.

Kitsap County is the northern part of a peninsula forming the western shore of the beautiful Puget Sound, a half-hour ferry ride from Seattle, Washington. It's far enough from the big city to be pastoral, with magnificent views of the snow-capped Olympic and Cascade ranges and enough water to satisfy the greediest float flyer.

The Kitsap Aircraft Radio Control Society, or Kitsap ARCS, was formed in 1968, and initially made use of the county fairgrounds for a flying field. But there were too many competing activities there, so we found a new home at the Bremerton National Airport, which had an unused runway that was serving as a drag strip for a local automobile club. It seemed ideal for RC flying. In time our club grew to over 125 members, largely due to our putting on air shows and fun-flying events for the public. But such a flyer's paradise was too good to be true: in 1997, the airport management, concerned that our model airplane flying constituted a hazard to their full-sized civil aircraft traffic, asked us to move. The Kitsap ARCS had to look for another home.

The County administration helped us to find an abandoned baseball field near the village of Olalla. But one neighbor pulled a NIMBI act and complained about our noise level, which we were keeping below 91 db. After spending \$5,000 to improve the old ball field, we were forced to move again.

In an act of gentlemanly sportsmanship, the Tacoma Narrows RC Club offered to share their field with us until we could find a new home.

Eventually Marlin Little, a stalwart flyer and a Kitsap ARCS member since 1997, found us a little-used gravel pit near Port Orchard. The McCormick Woods Land Management Corporation, owners of the property, had been negotiating with the County parks department to have the county buy part of their property as a park. Little managed to convince both parties that it would make sense to turn part of the new county parkland over to a flying club that needed a new home, and which would provide very careful stewardship of the county property.

A deal was struck. The happy developer offered to level the gravel pit for us and clear enough of the trees to make a fine, if somewhat rustic, flying field. In a rapid sequence of well-attended work parties, our gang raked the rocks, put in drainage ditches, finished leveling the 75' X 300' landing strip, and covered it with a heavy fabric surface. By 2001 we were making takeoffs and landings with wild enthusiasm.

In the spring of 2003 the temporary arrangement was formalized when the county officially signed the deal with the McCormick Woods management. We were informed by Mr. Joseph Coppo, Open Space Coordinator for the county Parks Department, that our new home was secure, and we would be allowed to remove whatever scrub bushes and fir trees necessary to enhance safe flying. All of this has been done, thanks to the unstinting hard work of Marlin Little, who, unfortunately, is constrained to move about in a motorized wheelchair.

The latest addition to the field has been the purchase and erection of a 20' X 100' canopy to cover our newly constructed flight benches during hot summer days. We also purchased two bleacher units to accommodate visitors and keep them away from the pit areas. They have come in handy these past two years for our annual air show, and also for the training programs we put on each summer for youngsters wanting to learn to fly. Our last air show drew nearly 700 spectators.

Future plans include replacing the fabric runway surface with a hard asphalt surface, putting in power lines and water, and further tree removal to expand the safe flying area and make it easier to find downed planes, which sometimes go undetected in the dense bush for months.

We take pride in working with our local community. Our club float consistently wins a prize every year in the Port Orchard "Fathoms O' Fun" float parade, and we man a very popular booth at the Kitsap County annual fair. Additionally, we host a booth at the three-day Kitsap Mall show. Our club's popularity has been a major factor in the rapidly expanding growth of RC flying in the area, expanding our current membership to 125-130.

Beginning last winter we initiated an educational program to teach local youths the fine art of building model aircraft at the Hobby Outlet, our newest local hobby shop, managed by Gary Rose Jr. And we will continue our flight school for youths aged 10 to 17, with both ground school and buddy box instruction classes offered, using the AMA school program.

In recognition of the untiring work of our field's negotiator, we have decided to name our field "Little Field". Well done, Marlin!