

STEVE KROG

COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR

Every Airport Has a Personality

Is yours a “friendly” airport?

BY STEVE KROG

SOME AIRPORTS FLOURISH WITH activity while others are very quiet. Why is that? Every airport makes an impression whether you fly in or drive in. And every airport has a personality. What kind of personality does your airport have?


I have had pilot friends visit from out of state. After spending several hours here doing some flying and meeting some of the aviators based at Hartford Municipal Airport (KHXF), they often comment that this airport is so “friendly.” People take the time to talk and show a person around. One visitor recently commented, “At our home airport we hardly know who is in the next hangar. People come to the airport, fly for a while, then go home. There is no camaraderie. It’s a very cold environment.”

Many of us based at the Hartford airport like to think that we are an extension of the EAA fly-in camping experience. By that I mean when attending EAA AirVenture Oshkosh, it’s like going to a family reunion, but the difference is everyone is happy and gets along, unlike some family reunions! Our airport has that friendly reunion-type atmosphere about it.

We have informal gatherings once or twice a week. Sometimes these gatherings involve cooked food, but other times it’s just snacks, refreshments, and a lot of good airplane talk. During the summer months, we have potluck cookouts at least once a week – but not until sunset, after all the flying is done. It is a great atmosphere that subsequently creates a great personality for our little airport.

For example, several days ago, a Maryland family of four landed at Hartford for fuel while en route to Montana. As the family was exiting the airplane, several of us met them on the ramp and welcomed them to our airport. We escorted the family to the Cub Air hangar, provided them with a clean bathroom, and treated them to ice-cold Cokes.

The conversation, as normal, involved questions about the trip and the airplane the pilot/husband/father was flying. When asked, he openly shared that he had rescued it from a boneyard and over a period of years had done a painstakingly long restoration. It was a treat listening to his story about locating parts and where he found them, etc. It truly was a labor of love.



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SIGHTS FROM KIXE

The pilot and his family then decided to remain overnight in Hartford, allowing the growing group of bystanders to continue asking questions. Finally, the pilot said he needed to get the family to a nearby motel. But before leaving he commented that he had been flying for several decades and had never experienced the friendliness and assistance experienced here at Hartford.

Another time, a Bird biplane en route to Oshkosh landed and was sitting at the fuel island. The pilot appeared distraught as I walked to the airplane. When asked if he needed help, he said that his newly installed fuel tank had developed a cracked seam. He was stuck, 50 miles from Oshkosh and 200 miles from home. Reluctantly, he accepted my offer for

help, and we towed his airplane to my hangar. Thirty minutes later we had drained and removed the fuel tank. I called another member of our airport crew who could weld aluminum, and that member contacted another who had the proper welding equipment. The gas tank was repaired and ready for reinstallation no more than 45 minutes later. And after another 45

minutes, the tank was back in the aircraft and full of fuel.

The owner just looked on in astonishment. He said, "Three hours ago I thought my flight to Oshkosh was over and it would take several weeks of chasing to get the tank repaired and the airplane flying again. But three hours later, my airplane is repaired and ready to go. No one will believe this story when I tell it! What a group of nice folks you have here."

It takes people to create an airport personality. Years ago, there was virtually no one at the Hartford airport after 4 p.m. on a Saturday. My wife, Sharon, and I would be the only people here. Having the place to ourselves we started making it a weekly event. When she got off work and arrived at the airport, I'd grill a couple of steaks and baked potatoes while she flew the Cub for an hour or so. Soon other pilots began showing up and joining us. By summer's end, we had a crew of about eight or 10 couples joining us on the summer Saturday evenings.



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WHAT CREATES AN AIRPORT PERSONALITY?

I remember chatting with some of the people in our group and asking their opinion of what makes an airport a fun place to go.

The first response was that it made no difference who you were or what your profession might be, everyone is treated as an equal. That is quite important to many folks, and we have continued to this day abiding by this idea. Our airport patrons come from very diverse backgrounds, but we all have one thing in common — our passion for flying airplanes!

Another member offered up an opinion as an analogy. He stated that if there are two taverns on your route home and one has a dozen parked cars, you might assume the bartender and the patrons in there must be friendly. The other has but one car, so you assume that bartender may not be very friendly. If you stop, you are most likely to stop at the tavern with traffic because it may be a friendly atmosphere.

“Our airport is like the busy tavern,” he added. “Sometimes I just stop with no intention of flying. I just look forward to some friendly conversation and camaraderie.”

And another group member added, “I enjoy coming to the airport not only because everyone is equal, but the ‘give and take’ is always fun. One must be able to accept as well give a lot of kidding and teasing!” You never know what is coming!

The equality and the friendly kidding make the airport an enjoyable place to visit. Those of us who have been longtime residents make a concerted effort to preserve this atmosphere as well. Going to the airport should be fun, even if you are unable to fly on that particular day. All of these comments together create a positive personality.

SIGHTS FROM KHXF



Individual personalities also play a significant role in the success and friendliness of an airport personality. We have one individual, for instance, who has flown professionally since turning 18. He is a wealth of knowledge, a resource for parts and sound advice, and always is willing to help. Now retired, he buys, sells, and swaps aircraft parts. If you need a specific part, he will find it for you if



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he does not already have it in his hangar. We sometimes refer to him as “Sanford & Son,” for those of you who watched television in the ’70s. He’ll leave the airport with a pickup load of parts to be delivered that he has sold. But frequently he returns with a bigger load than what he left with.

Another strong personality contributing to the friendly and positive airport personality is an individual who can “fix” anything, be it aircraft, lawn mower, or golf cart. Whatever he does, he does with great pride, precision, and perfection and always has time to help a fellow pilot. This fellow is restoring a fabric-covered aircraft. Not satisfied with how it was looking, he removed the fabric and started over. The workmanship was beautiful, well above fabric work that most do. However, he wasn’t satisfied, tore it all off, and began re-covering again, even better than before.

But this is not his only specialty. He is also an excellent chef and a couple of evenings a week is known to cook up something that few can do. When I host events at the flight

school, I have him cook for the activity. Attendees know that if he is cooking, they won’t be fed the usual hot dog or brat. It will probably be something like smoked brisket or better! He’s a true asset to helping to make this airport a place to visit and adds to the positive personality for the Hartford airport.

“There’s always something going on at Hartford, so I try to stop in whenever I can.”

We have many more individuals, all playing key roles in helping to make our airport what it is today. Although no two individuals come from the same background or profession, they all mesh well together once setting foot on the airport property.

A couple of weekends ago an acquaintance flew into the Hartford airport. I asked

how his flight had been, and he commented that he had stopped by three other airports before coming here and there was no activity at any of the other airports, so he decided to drop in here.

“There’s always something going on at Hartford, so I try to stop in whenever I can,” he said.

I am sure there are many other airports around the country that have created a similar atmosphere and personality as we have here at Hartford. It is the people who make an effort to create a positive atmosphere, and thus present a fun, positive personality for everyone to experience and share.

Maybe it is time for you to take the lead and hold a small brat fry for some of your hangar neighbors. You’ll never know what might come of it if you don’t give it a try. *EAA*

Steve Krog, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than four decades and giving tailwheel instruction for nearly as long. In 2006 he launched Cub Air Flight, a flight training school using tailwheel aircraft for all primary training.

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