

FVAC Flying Field

20th Anniversary

Special Edition

The Flypaper is a
monthly publication of

The Fox Valley Aero Club

An Illinois not-for-profit
Corporation

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Note from the Editor:

This special edition celebrates 20 years since the acquisition and building of the current Fox Valley Aero Club flying field.

This edition celebrates all of the members that made the current field happen and were part of the initial construction process. In addition it should be a very informative publication to show everyone who has joined the FVAC after September of 2004 everything that was needed to make such a spectacular flying site happen.

I have been part of a number of clubs across the country, beginning in Illinois then Washington state, Arizona and Colorado. In my humble opinion, the Fox Valley Aero Club is one of, if not the best, model flying clubs out there. The club celebrates all aspects of model aviation from micro electrics to Jets. The club welcomes everyone and has numerous activities around the year to enjoy a common interest in model aviation.

I want to personally thank all of the club members involved in building the current club site. I encourage everyone to thank those involved!

This issue begins with a reissue of the original article profiling the FVAC field published in the August, 2006 issue of Model Aviation Magazine. The article was written by Darryl Hodges. The article provides great background to the financing and construction of the current site.

Following the article, I have put together a step by step photo montage of the physical construction of the field. It is amazing that between April and September of 2004, the site went from a corn field to the wonderful flying field that we all enjoy now.

Finally, I have included several pages of "Then and Now" photo comparisons.

I would like to specifically thank several members who helped in producing this issue. Many thanks to Dale Gathman for providing the pictures taken in 2004. Thanks go to Karl Griesbaum for spending several hours sitting with me to go through photos and discuss the field construction and those involved. Thanks also to Dave Murray for taking the drone photo on the next page!

Paul

FVAC Flying Field

March 21, 2024



New Life for Fox Valley Aero Club

by Darryl Hedges

THE FOX VALLEY Aero Club (FVAC) is located approximately 40 miles west of Chicago in Saint Charles, Illinois. Since it was founded in 1929, the club has enjoyed steady growth and amiable relations with the community. Most people would consider it to be a typical AMA club.

But in 2003 and 2004 the FVAC felt the full force of a series of events that had been building for a number of years. It resulted in the club's losing its flying field and being forced to either finance and construct a new field in a short period of time or simply fade into the history books.

The FVAC's experience is one that other clubs across the country are facing more and more often as local communities wrestle with the need to enlarge their tax base through new-home construction and expansion. In the process, any available open land surrounding these communities is being annexed for the greater good of the public, which always outweighs the needs of the few—such as RC fliers.

Background: Founded in 1929 as the Flying Fools, the club began its existence in the days when model aviation consisted primarily of hand-launching FF gliders and rubber-band-powered airplanes. In those days members flew their models at a variety of informal field locations scattered throughout the area. In 1979 the Flying Fools changed its name to the Fox Valley Aero Club.

Working in cooperation with the City of St. Charles and the Saint Charles Park District, the FVAC was able to secure a 15-acre "permanent" site for an RC flying field—part of 365 acres of land that had recently been acquired by the Park District from the Illinois Department of Corrections. A local drive-in restaurant donated a steel pavilion that served as the main gathering area and provided shelter from inclement weather.

As the years passed, the FVAC and the surrounding communities continued to grow. During that time several of the club's key members continued building relationships with local government and Park District leaders in the hopes of protecting the group from the relentless expansion and growth that was taking place. Those efforts would eventually help the FVAC find a new home—but it would be years later.



Soccer Is King: When the FVAC opened its old field, it was surrounded on three sides by farmland and sat adjacent to the Saint Charles youth center: a State of Illinois correctional facility that houses approximately 500 wayward young men. But that didn't last forever. As one member put it:

"Over the years, housing started coming out west with a vengeance. When you have houses, you have kids. When you have kids, you have soccer, and when you have soccer, you have soccer moms."

Take heed; soccer moms are a formidable driving force for change within any community today. Soccer's growing popularity required the Park District to build more soccer fields. As more soccer fields popped up throughout the area, the club was faced with a couple of unique problems.

Imagine having an RC flying field surrounded by soccer fields on three sides and a state-run correctional facility on the other. Not only were the kids often distracted in the middle of a soccer game by the RC models flying nearby, but the possibility of an airplane going off-course and injuring a child was an ever present danger.

On top of that, if a model traveled in the other direction, over the barbed-wire fence surrounding the youth center, and was lost, it was an adventure trying to retrieve it. If the right people were on duty at the time, things usually went well. But more often than not, there was considerable friction with the administration of the facility.

One Wayward Airplane Changes Everything: Then in 2003 the hammer finally fell. A guest who was visiting the club crashed his model on a soccer field during half-time of a game. That's all it took to set things in motion.

Although the club worked feverishly with the Park District to severely restrict the hours when the field could be in operation by limiting flying to between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m., the Park District soon notified the club that it would be closing the field to make room for more soccer fields.

The clock began running. The club had one year and a \$5,000 donation from the Park District to find and build a new field elsewhere.

Dealing With Disaster: Where do you start when you get the word that your current field is about to be acquired by the local community?

The Park District suggested that we begin our search for a new home by talking with the City of Saint Charles to determine whether or not the City owned any open land that would be suitable for a new field. After many meetings with City and County officials, a 10-acre site was identified. It was located adjacent to a city waste-processing facility and the Tri-County 911 Emergency Dispatch Center.

The good news was that the site was actually part of a larger piece of land that was technically located in floodplain, so no new homes could be built on it. The Illinois Department of Corrections owned the property, and it was leased to a local farmer for growing crops.

The bad news was that the site had no direct access road and was being farmed. In addition, the land was straddling the boundaries between Saint Charles and its neighboring community to the south; the City of Geneva.

At the city's suggestion, the club hired an architect to draw plans based on the new location. The club originally wanted to have the field built facing north to minimize the effects of the sun during early morning and winter hours. That would have placed the field on the Geneva side of the property.

When Geneva realized that an RC field would be on its property, it nixed the idea because of concerns about liability, even though the club was going to be covered by AMA's liability insurance. So the field was turned around and oriented on the Saint Charles side of the property facing south. That simple change in plans cost the club \$3,500 in wasted architectural drawings.

A Budget for a New Field: For a number of years the FVAC had made it a practice to take a portion of all revenue generated by events or dues and deposit it in a fund for the eventual construction of a new field.

When the time finally came, the club had approximately \$60,000 in the bank. Everyone thought that was going to be more than enough to construct the new field. But as it turned out, the new-field construction fund was approximately \$130,000 short of the mark.

The club initially solicited a bid from a reputable construction company in the area to build the field. The bid was to include the installation of a 50 x 800-foot asphalt runway to accommodate jets and large-scale aircraft and provide plenty of room for our trainers; the removal of any existing trees; the installation of a storm sewer to control water runoff; the construction of a paved access road to the property; and final grading of the land and seeding.

The contractor's price was an eye-popping \$255,137! The contractor estimated that all work could be completed within a six-week timeframe.

Faced with this staggering construction estimate, the FVAC asked the architectural firm that had drawn the plans for the new field to submit an alternate budgetary estimate. It came back with a figure of \$191,278: a savings of roughly \$63,000, but still well above what the club had anticipated.

At this point the group was faced with a decision to either find a way to raise a lot of money quickly or find a way to cut costs, by having club members do most of the manual labor. The club chose the latter while devoting major efforts to figuring out how to do the former.

Members Are a Club's Greatest Resource: One of the FVAC members was a heavy-equipment operator by trade and volunteered to head up the project. Through his efforts and those of a core of dedicated club members, the new-field construction project moved forward.

The first thing that had to be done before construction could begin was to have a "Field Tile Survey" completed to locate water-runoff subsystems. The existing blueprints had to be revised as part of the construction process.

July 14, 2004, at a preconstruction meeting with the Saint Charles engineering department, the club submitted its "Financial Guarantee" and "Escrow Agreement". The City required these to ensure completion of the project.

That afternoon, club members began cutting down weeds and removing brush at the new field. A week later a professional tree service began removing trees and grinding stumps. Before any earth-moving could be done, club members erected more than 2,800 linear feet of silt fencing during one of many regularly scheduled "work parties".

For construction to proceed at the accelerated pace needed to finish the field before the end of 2004, the club arranged to have city inspections done on an almost daily basis. July 30, 2004, full-scale grading of the property began with donated and rented bulldozers. To save money, club members were taught how to check the grade for proper elevations.

In the next several months, activity at the field reached a fever pitch. A host of subprojects went on simultaneously: construction of an asphalt runway and taxiway; construction of a 1,550-foot access road and parking lot; striping on the runway and parking lot; construction of a concrete pad for the steel

pavilion brought from the old field; and installation of a flag pole and spectator bleachers. The field passed its final inspection on October 31, 2004.

Additional amenities were installed in the spring of 2005, such as a chain-link fence separating the active field area from the parking lot and spectator areas, eight pilot stations along the flightline, tennis nets donated by the local high school to act as safety netting along the flightline, a number of new wooden work tables, a monument honoring past members who had passed away, and electric power at the pavilion.

Creatively Financing The Future: While all this activity was taking place, the FVAC's board members were trying to devise a way to pay for everything without having to mortgage their homes. Using the club's \$60,000 new-field fund and the \$5,000 donated by the Park District as a starting point, the club was faced with the task of having to raise roughly \$125,000 in an extremely short period of time. Following is how it was done.

1) The Board of Directors approved the levying of an "assessment" of \$300 per club member to be used for construction of the new field. At that time the club had roughly 200 members. If all members had agreed to pay the assessment, that would have raised approximately \$60,000. In actuality, 55 members chose to drop out of the club without paying the assessment.

When the project was finally finished, it was estimated that the assessment paid by existing members and new-member "initiation fees" contributed roughly \$73,000 to the fund.

2) Several long-standing club members agreed to secure a four-year unsecured loan from a local bank for the projected \$50,000 shortfall. Shortly after the loan went into effect, the adjustable interest rate on the loan went up, and the loan holders were faced with paying approximately \$400 per month in interest on the loan. A better solution was needed immediately.

3) One of the club's members came up with the idea of a unique "lottery". The club purchased a large glass fishbowl and filled it with 50 wooden golf balls numbered 1 through 50. Each ball was worth \$1,000. Members were encouraged to purchase one or more balls at their discretion.

In effect they were loaning the club \$1,000 for each ball they purchased—interest free. The intention was for the FVAC to begin repaying the "loans" as soon as it was back on its feet financially. The Board promised members that it would begin drawing balls from the jar as quickly as possible.

As it turned out, all 50 balls were purchased within days. Some members bought one and others more than one. One member purchased 34 balls. True to its word, the club began drawing balls for repayment in late 2005. As of February 2006, only 14 balls remained unpaid.

Lessons to Be Learned: What advice would the FVAC have for your club?

1) Start saving for your future field now. Begin setting aside monies now for that new field in the future. Land prices continue to skyrocket.

Figure that a new field will conservatively cost a minimum of \$100,000. Depending on the amenities you provide and the initial cost of the land, your final cost could easily be two or three times that amount. It would not be out of the question to take your initial projected budget amount and double it.

2) Start looking for a new field now. Have members keep their eyes open for potential flying-field locations. Work with your local community's planning and building departments to determine where future housing development and growth is likely to occur. Identify unused or unwanted land and determine if it could be converted for use as a flying field.

Consider buying available farm property immediately if possible. Finance the purchase over an extended period of time. Buy far more land than you think you will actually need.

In the end the FVAC negotiated a 10-year lease with the City of Saint Charles for the 9.5 acres that it currently occupies, with an option for a second 10-year period. The Club pays a reasonable \$805 per year.

3) Ask for help. Maintaining and nurturing your club's relationship with the local community and government agencies is critical to its survival.

Enlist the help of various government agencies at the local, county, and state levels. Identify people in the government who can be your allies and who can get things done on your behalf, such as the mayor, city councilmen, city attorneys, and local park-district officials. Even your state senator or representative can intercede on your behalf if needed. The Illinois Department of Corrections was a major player in our drama.

4) Give back to the community. Look for ways your club can demonstrate its goodwill and enhance its role as a "good neighbor" with the local park district and other community organizations.

Approach them with a "What can we do for you?" attitude. Give back to the community you live in. Car washes, fund-raising events, and charity drives are proven ways of supporting other groups in the community.

5) Get kids involved with your club. Sponsor a "Kids' Day" each year to train kids how to fly. Work with your local Boy Scout and Girl Scout organizations, Civil Air Patrol groups, and church and fraternal organizations to get kids involved in the sport. Every child has one or two parents, which can be your greatest allies in fending off hostile attacks from outside sources. Remember those soccer moms? Parents are always looking for new activities they can enjoy with their kids. Joining the local RC club is just one of the ways they can have fun together!

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6) Publicize your events. Get the word out about who you are, and what your club has to offer people. Get the local television stations and newspapers to cover club-sponsored events. Hold open houses and training classes for newcomers to the sport. Work with other clubs to sponsor swap meets and outings. Educate the public about the joys of flying RC models.

I hope your club will not have to cope with the types of events the FVAC did in 2003 and 2004. Preparing now for that inevitable day in the future when progress brushes your club aside to make room for more soccer fields or a new shopping center will make your life much easier!

The Article above was originally printed in the August, 2006 issue of Model Aviation Magazine. Permission to reprint the article was given by Jay Smith, Editor, Model Aviation.

The following 14 pages will show the work that the club member put in from April to September of 2004 to build our current FVAC field. The pictures go all the way from clearing the corn and trees to installation of the asphalt runway, ramp and pavillion.

I have tried to place names with faces as much as possible. Due to the file size I could not make some of the pictures much larger than they are. In many of the pictures showing groups of club members I could not identify everyone, and because of that, did not place any names with images. So, if you see yourself in some of the images and not named, that is the reason why.

Unless specifically noted, photo credits are collectively given to Jeff Anderson, Karl Griesbaum and Paul Douds.

Thank you,
Paul

Clearing the Corn, Weeds and Trees

Immediately following the signing of the lease with the City of St. Charles the preparations for the new FVAC flying field commenced. The first steps were to clear the field of corn and remove trees. The photo to the right shows the farmer clearing the flying site of corn. The image is looking west to the treeline in the far distance.

The image below was taken a little closer to the "bend in the road" and is still facing west.



The photo to the right shows the transformation that occurred after all of the corn and trees were removed. The field space is now becoming a little recognizable to the space we have now.



Silt Fence Installation

Prior to moving forward on the field a Silt Fence had to be installed around the perimeter of the work area. Shown below is the group of men who made quick work of the project.



The purpose of a silt fence is to protect downslope properties by removing suspended solids from runoff prior to leaving the site. In short, it is in place to prevent any "crud" in the soil from moving into adjoining properties and bodies of water.

Lee Patterson manned the trencher and the rest of the crew dug and installed the silt fence.



Lee Patterson



Photos above and below show the fence taking shape. With all hands on deck the fence installation was done in less than a day.



Material Burn

After weeks of cutting weeds and trees there was a large accumulation of debris. After receiving approval from the city and powers that be, the pile of debris was set on fire using a small amount of glow fuel, appropriately! The fire slowly burned and smoked for 2 weeks!



Runway Layout

By early August of 2004 all the preparations were complete to finally layout the runway. The photo below shows the stakes marking runway location. Club member were taught survey and grading skills to grade the runway area in preparation for laying gravel and eventually asphalt.



After some grading, the runway is slowly taking shape as shown in the next photo.

The image below, looking west, shows the runway having been rolled out. The inner ramp area has been roughed out.



Cutting in the Road and parking lot

As the runway work continued, the work for cutting in the road from Route 38 was also underway. To many of the newer members, even myself, it may be a surprise that the road was prepared and installed by club members.



The parking lot was also prepared for surfacing.



The photo below really shows how much work was done and indeed how far the great flying site that we know now has come. In the foreground is the prepared parking lot. Interestingly in the background is the shed surrounded by shrubs and trees. In the background to the right is the old barn. If you look between the shed and barn is a huge pile of junk and debris. All of that junk, I am told, was placed there by folks from the boys home across the road. It took many, many large trash containers to haul all of that junk away.



Laying in the Stone for the road

Following is a great series of photos showing the laying of gravel in preparation for asphaltting the road and runway. The road required about 6 inches of stone and the runway required about 2 inches.



The photo above shows the recently completed 911 call center building. Note that the parking lot for the building has not yet been installed.



Laying gravel for the runway



Many truckloads of gravel were required to cover the runway and ramp area in preparation for putting down asphalt. In the photo to the right you can make out the runway, taxiways and ramp area.



Laying asphalt for the runway, road and lot

Asphalting was started on September 7 of 2004. Everything from the runway to the parking lot and road were very close to being completely finished.



Second Day of Asphalt and First Flights

After the final Asphalt was put down, the call of a new smooth runway was too loud to ignore. The new runway, although smooth, still had hazards that were present, as the following sequence shows! Steve Baker is making one of the first flights on the newly finished runway.



Taxiing out



On the Roll!



Ooops!



Taking the runway



Looks like everyone had a good Laugh!

Asphalt Stripping

After the asphalt installation, the stripping was completed. The stripping was completed both by professionals and club members.



Pavillion Installation

The following set of photos show the process for installing the pavillion.

Before the concrete could be poured for the pavillion pad, the anchor points for the pavillion supports had to be dug and filled with concrete. Once that was complete the slab was poured and smoothed out.



In the photos to the right you can see that a lot of men and machinery were required to install the pavillion .

The first step was to install the supports onto the concrete pad.



Once secure the roof was delicately put into place using two cranes. The roof was then welded permanently into place.



The roof was welded into place and transport supports removed. Looking at the two photos to the right displays how far the pavillion has come in the subsequent 20 years. Walls, juice bar, pop machine and portable heat have made it a spectacular structure to protect members from the weather.



Flag Pole, Windsock and Landscaping



Prior to and during the installation of the pavilion, the grounds were surface and prepared for landscaping/seeding. Photos are shown to the left.

After the Pavillion installation was complete, the flag pole and windsock were installed. The flag-pole now supports the field cameras.

Finally, the original field sign was placed on the Pavillion.



Karl Griesbaum shown delivering his hand-built 72 Mhz frequency pin box. The box is painted in aviation checkerboard red & white. The box is still attached to the pavillion but is now painted gray.



Benches and Bleachers

One of the bleachers that is currently in use at the field was discovered in the shed. No doubt placed there by the boys' school across the road. The club has put it to good use over the last 20 years!

The original setup tables were sunk into the ground. Eventually the tables were modified to be movable and placed on the concrete tiles, that we have now.



Flying at the Newly Completed Field

This collection of photos was taken by Paul Douds on Several days late in October, 2004. You can see that some of the grass has started to come in. These photos really show what all of the effort was for. Again, Thank You to all of the members for making our beautiful flying site happen!



Then *And* Now

The Next several pages show pictures of the Fox Valley Aero Club site during construction next to pictures taken in March of 2024. I think it reflects all of the work and care of many, many people that went into a truly great flying site!

April, 2004



This spectacular photo comparison shows that trees and the remnants of a rail line once occupied the center of the field. Additionally you can see that the white barn has been removed. The shed is standing in the original picture at top, but cannot be seen due to all of the vegetation surrounding it!

March, 2024



Then *And* Now



April, 2004

In this set of photos you can see the approach to the field looking west. Note that the nearer trees on the left side of the upper image have yet to be removed to make room for the runway!



March, 2024

Then *And* Now

April, 2004

This photo set is, once again, showing the field looking to the west. The corn and trees have been removed.

Note that the perspective from the current day photo shown below is not entirely correct. I should have been standing well to my left, almost to the runway.



March, 2024



Then *And* Now



August, 2004

This photo comparison shows all of the work that has gone into creating the grass parking space. Note that the white barn has been removed.



March, 2024

Then *And* Now

August, 2004

Although the image from 2004 is a little dark, you can see the shed almost swallowed up by trees and shrubs. Since then, everything has been cleared to make the shed an essential support and storage building for the club.

The barn has been removed. Also note the substantial pile of junk and rubble between the barn and shed that, no doubt, had accumulated over years.



March, 2024



Then *And* Now



August, 2004

This dramatic set of photos show the shed going from basically unusable to a very practical building for storage as well as club events. All of the scrap and rubble had to be removed. Over the years, the overgrown shrubs and trees were removed and trimmed away.



March, 2024

Parting Shot



Looking forward to the next great 20 years at
Fox Valley Aero Club!

Mike Bargman Photo