

Skymasters Club History

The Skymasters RC Club was founded in 1974 and today it is one of the largest model airplane club in the country and boasts several nationally recognized modelers. In fact, members of our club have been on the US Scale FAI Team and many members contribute articles to our national model magazines.

It all started in early 1974 when a few RC flyers, who had lost a flying field were looking for a decent place to fly and a club to join. The only RC hobby shop in the area was in Warren at 13 Mile and Mound. The RC flyers in the area were flying in any spot which offered hope of takeoff and landing without instant re-kitting. The first field was found behind the Joshua Doore Furniture Store on 14 Mile, east of Dequindre. At this field, a model shop owner put up a sign that said "model airport". The City Manager became mildly upset and wanted to know who authorized a model airport in his city. That was the end of the 14 Mile field.

A group of RC pilots decided to form a club. Our first few meetings were held in Tom Marzlak's house in Warren. Approximately 13 or 14 RC flyers were present. Even then, as a fledgling club, we had coffee and doughnuts and a 50/50 drawing. In those early days meetings were held in various places: members' basements, work places after hours, at the field, wherever we could find a location. We chose our first officers by the volunteer method--whoever wanted to get things started. Tom Marzlak was the first President with Jerry Parent as Vice President, "Big H" Maseles was the Secretary/Treasurer. In this early effort to form our Club we kicked around different names such as "Skynights", "Airmasters", and a number of others and finally decided on "Skymasters". We did not want the name to spell out a specific location because our members were from different areas around this section of Southeast Michigan. At this same time, Ed Atkins, a member who was a commercial artist, said he would design a logo for our Club. He decided that as long as the "Genie" was the master of the air waves we would place him on a bi-plane in the sky.

Other presidents followed over the years: Al Honeycomb, Cliff Tacie, Chet Brady, Jack Goodrich, Bill Leppard, Harlan Neuville, Dave Killian, Tom Weiss, Larry Phillips, Gary Wells, Barry Ptak, Ed Saumier, Jim Hauck, Vince Pettke, Darrell Watts, Pete Foss, Kevin Phillips, Greg Cardillo, Joe Finkelstine, Gary Weak, Ross Hardy, Ross Jones, Joe Hass, Dave Wendt, Dave Lange, and Ken Gutelius. Many of these served multiple terms over the years.

In 1974 we started to fly as a club by the south entrance of the Hampton Estates. The field was off Auburn Road just east of Rochester Road. We flew there for a couple of years. When the traffic got too heavy, we had to find another field. Also Wakeford and Wayne Herbert, better known as Butch and Dutch, drove across Auburn Road in Butch's pickup into a big field. They found it to be fairly flat, but covered with weeds 2 to 4 feet high. An agreement was signed with the owners on June 3, 1975, which permitted us to use the field for our activities.

At Auburn Rd. we had 67 acres of weeds. With mountains of work by the members and Roy Morgan's tractor, it was finally cut, raked, hauled and burned. We finally had an excellent area to fly, with a school and a golf course far to the east, M-59 to the south and Auburn Rd. 200 yards north. For several years, Roy Morgan spent hours cutting the grass for us. Then another member, Chet Brady, contributed his tractor for our use. Now the club had a tractor that could be left at a nearby location to keep the field well groomed.

At about this same time a new hobby shop arrived on the scene. Henderson's Family Hobbies on Auburn Road, east of Dequindre Road, which was great for the club. Bob and Glenna Henderson and our club hit it off very well. The hobby shop grew into what some say was the best in the state, and Skymasters owes much to Bob and Glenna's "back room". There every Saturday morning, RC modelers from all around gathered to show off their craft, help beginners, swap technical data, general information about our hobby, and help each other out.

The Club was growing quickly, and on June 22, 1976, we filed articles of incorporation with the State of Michigan and became a non-profit organization. As a corporation we are governed by a Constitution and By-Laws.

One of the greatest challenges for clubs all across the United States is securing, developing, and maintaining good flying fields. In 1976, the club's old timers started looking around for a backup field and found a landfill on Hamlin Rd., west of Ryan Rd. in Shelby Township. With hundreds of hours of volunteer labor, we eventually had a pretty good grass field. The wisdom of the old timers was verified when we lost the Auburn Rd field due to a neighbors noise complaint. An incident that happens all too frequently with model clubs across the nation today. We were back to one field. Again the search for a backup field was on.

We found an abandoned gravel pit off Tienken Road, east of Rochester. The owner's permission was granted and we were back to work. The big job here was covering the gravel and growing grass. Again it was an adequate field but some lawless off road vehicle drivers and motorcyclists found our nice, flat grassy field a nice change from hill climbing. Art Gruner and others spent many fruitless hours repairing their damage. We finally gave up.

Back to one field. But providence had given us a new resource--The Flying Tigers. They were a group of modelers within Skymasters, consisting of retirees. They searched Rochester, Pontiac, and Lake Orion Areas; and found likely fields in Bald Mountain Recreation Area. Now came many hours of phone calls, meetings with park rangers and trips to Lansing. Mr. Butterfield, in charge of state park grounds, obtained permission for us to develop 20 acres of state park land on Greenshield Road. We also had to satisfy the Lake Orion Township officials. Many thanks must go to Chet Brady, Felix Cole, Tom Weiss, Larry Phillips, and other Skymasters members for their successful pursuit of this goal. More hard volunteer work and we had a marvelous field.

Then in 1989 we lost the Hamlin field to commercial development. In 1990, with the prospect of losing the Greenshield Road field looming because a couple of neighbors were complaining about noise, we leased a parcel of sod farm a few miles west of Oxford. This field was obtained through the efforts of the members of the field committee.

The Greenshield field was lost in the Fall of 1990 and the State Park officials and the Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) officials worked with us (Ed Saumier, Joe Hass, Chet Brady and a cast of dozens) to complete the development of our new Scripps Road field (still in Bald Mountain Park). After removing dozens of trees, 6000 dollars worth of bulldozing, grading courtesy of Gary Van Hevel, rock picking, rolling, seeding, rolling, seeding, etc. the field began to take shape. Over the next year or so the runway was seeded several times but the grass wouldn't fill in very well. After lots of discussion, 4000 yards of sod were purchased from Baldwin Meadows Sod Farm . Led by "The Dirty Dozen" (they know who they are), many club members spent the better part of a week of evenings plus a weekend laying the sod to produce an excellent runway.

The wisdom of two flying fields was again proven out. In August 1992, we were informed that our lease at Baldwin Meadows Sod Farm would not be renewed for 1993. We had lost another field to noise complaints from neighbors.

In the summer of 1994 the club lost a very good friend when Henderson's Family Hobbies on Auburn Road closed when Bob and Glenna Henderson retired. Their retirement party was bittersweet indeed but we wish them well. To compensate for the loss of Saturday mornings in the winter, Steve Fredericks started hosting greatly appreciated bi-weekly "Bull Sessions" in his shop.

We have enjoyed over 15 years at our current Scripps Road location, and have a great relationship with both the DNR and Orion Township, and look forward to many more years. Changes in technology have greatly reduced the noise previously associated with the hobby – from effective mufflers to electric flight.

More recently, John and Tracie Hoover opened Flightline Hobby in our 'backyard' – just two miles from our flying field providing a great resource for modelers in the area. Our local hobby shops have been a great source of support for club events over the years and are all greatly appreciated.

We continue to support the community around us while promoting the R/C hobby. Our "Bald Mountain Involvement Day" and participation in various community and scouting events are key activities for us.

Our club has gotten national recognition for our events, especially the "Midwest Regional Float Fly" which has been the subject of over 10 feature articles in national magazines, 4 cover photos, and 6 feature videos.

For the last several years we have sponsored 'Winter Indoor Flying' at Ultimate Soccer Arena in Pontiac, providing a welcome weekly break from winter for flying smaller electric airplanes.

Our club has been able to attract nationally known speakers and companies to come share their time and knowledge with us at our club meetings. We have a premier student instruction program to help newcomers getting started. Our membership has grown over the last several years, and we look forward to introducing more people to this wonderful hobby!

Many thanks are due to the volunteers who have worked so hard: running our concession stands, welding trailers and gates, making and painting signs, building transmitter impound stands, building and repairing fences, seeding, mowing, fertilizing, running contests, running the Club, instructing fledglings, and working on the many committees that are needed to maintain our access to flying sites and to keep the Club growing! We couldn't do it without you.

Harold "Big H" Maseles - 1986

Pete Foss – 1998

Greg Cardillo – 2002, 2008, 2014