

HODGE PARK - DO YOU CARE? BY GARY HIMES

Did you know the Northern Knights Model Airplane Club was first AMA chartered in the late 60's? It was also the first model airplane club north of the river. The Sunchasers and the Dam Busters were spawned from the Northern Knights.

My personal existence with the Northern Knights came into being late in 1989 when I arrived at the Pleasant Valley Flying Field with a rebuilt and patched up Falcon 56 3-channel I acquired from my brother and a brand new Airtronics Radio I mail-ordered in.

Much water has flowed under the old bridge since my induction into the "Northern Knights". When I first joined, there were in the neighborhood of sixty members. We lost the Pleasant Valley site because of noise complaints. In reality, the complaints were probably against dirt bikes. But that didn't matter, they kicked us out anyway.

The next flying site was the World'S Of Fun back parking lot during off season. This was very limited flying as only 5 people at a time were allowed on the property. Soon the park opened and we were kicked out of there.

The next flying site was a private funded affair on private land. There was actually two attempts of fields made in this adventure. The first failed because of complaints of overflying other peoples land. The second was on top of a hill surrounded by trees and dead-sticks were murder. Other problems arose, so we moved on. Personal pocketbooks were lighter and much sweat was lost.

The next flying site was an ex-landfill east of I-435 and south of the river. By this time, club membership had dwindled to about a dozen members. Membership did not grow at this site. A lot of people flat did not like it. We then lost this site when the Corps of Engineers started dredging the Little Blue River and dumping the dredgings on top of our flying site.

We spent the best part of the 1991 flying season without a flying site. We had to use other clubs flying sites to fly.

In January, 1992 we acquired our present flying site through the diligent efforts of Roy Orth. In the agreement with the Parks Department, the Northern Knights are responsible for policing the site, guarantee insurance through the AMA and maintain upkeep of the field

(mowing). Things progressed at a rapid pace. The Parks Dept installed our gate, graded the field, dug fencing holes, and graveled the drive & parking lot. Volunteers hauled used fence posts and fencing from the bottom of the hill (donated by Parks Dept), installed fencing, raked and seeded the landing strip. WALLA!!.... Look what we have today!!!

My little history lesson has a point, flying fields are hard to get and even harder to keep. We now have, in my opinion, potentially the best flying site in the metro area. Safety can not be stressed enough. I have heard it said, there has been no problems at our current site. This is not true! Truth is, there have been no major catastrophes, but there has been many incidences.

I personally know of the following incidences. Two occurrences of hand in prop causing immediate hospital care (one cost in excess of \$2,500 medical bills), two vehicles have been hit by aircraft, one fly away which landed on the golf course, two aircraft strained through the fence and at least twelve crashes of totally demolished aircraft. There are three rules at our current flying field which must be strictly adhered to. AMA required, no flying south (golf course) any further than normal approaches and no flying over the pits (west). The last rule is a repeat of AMA's radio control rule #3 which reads as follows: *I will perform my initial turn after takeoff away from the pit or spectator areas, and I will not thereafter fly over pit or spectator areas, unless beyond my control.* This has bigger implications in our case since the soccer fields are west/southwest of us and are closer than most people think.

It's a fact crashes are going to happen. It doesn't really matter whether it is because of "dumb thumbs" or "equipment failure", crashes are going to happen. That is why we don't fly over the pits (west) or over the golf course (south). We can not afford an accident where personal injury, or worse, is caused by negligence. With all the benefits we have reaped from the Parks Dept, if we get kicked out of this place, you can be assured we will never find another field as good and as accessible as this one north of the river.

If someone is breaking the rules it is the responsibility of each and every one of us to inform that person what he/she is doing wrong. In doing so, you don't have to be nasty or physical, just a firm reminder should do.