

OHIO AVIATION ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
OPENING REMARKS
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Every morning each of you turns that key in the airport office lock, puts on the coffee, and performs whatever is your normal “airport preflight checklist” for the day. In many respects, the folks in your surrounding community know who you are, and generally appreciate what you’re doing, but most don’t give it much thought on a day-to-day basis. Such is human nature, I suppose.

That is, until Uncle Charlie has a heart attack and needs to be life-flighted to a hospital for care...or a local business owner finds out that a client-directed deadline can only be met with air service from your field....or that kid from church whose had a love for flying since he or she was four years old is finally old enough to take lessons. Then you become the most important person in the county.

THAT is GA, and yours is a crucial role, for, without you, Charlie might not make it; that business may lose a valuable client, and Bobby or Suzie might never learn to fly and become the airline or freight captain of tomorrow.

So, what else does GA do for our communities, state and nation?

General aviation pilots, with their aircraft, fight fires, catch criminals, find and rescue the lost, treat crops, transport the sick, gather the news, and deliver sensitive packages. GA flies 166 million passengers every year and moves millions of pounds of goods around the country.

Let's personalize it a bit...the "who" of GA. It's the Medevac pilots who whisk loved ones to trauma centers for life-saving treatment; humanitarian pilots that deliver supplies after a disaster; the businessmen who chose your community's airport to base their operations thereby creating needed job opportunities; aerial firefighters who release the fire retardant to prevent wildfires from engulfing homes; mechanics who keep more than 230,000 aircraft flying; and, flight instructors who train those who become our military and commercial airline pilots.

Beyond that, millions of spectators watch airplanes take to the sky every summer at airshows. Hikers, campers, and sportsman use GA to travel to remote locations to enjoy the hobbies that make life enjoyable beyond work.

Farmers, ranchers and commercial fishermen depend on GA to plant and fertilize their crops, protect their livestock, and spot schools of fish to keep our food supply running smoothly.

Medical evacuation helicopters, volunteer patient and organ transportation, and doctors rely on GA to provide life-saving transportation and to travel among remote locations.

All of you know this...I truly am “preaching to the choir.” But what’s the *perception* of GA “out there” among the general public.

If you listen to the media, you might think that private aircraft are exclusively toys for the rich. But the reality is very different – it's the 25 to 40 year-old Cessna that folks pay to hangar at your facility and to have an annual done on every year. These are your friends and neighbors – and the vast majority of them aren't "rich!"

But, unfortunately, way too many policy-makers still don't understand the vital economic, health, and safety missions that general aviation performs for American communities and our national transportation system.

GA continues to face some of the greatest challenges in what is our 100-year history. State and local governments are pushing new taxes and restrictions on airport operations with one-size-fits-all mandates. Airport security comes to mind....you know exactly what I mean here, don't you?!

In our communities, states, and Washington—if these ideas and plans don’t change, there will be a lot less flying in America. And any reduction in GA flying activity threatens some of the 1.2 million GA jobs that currently exist. Additionally, critical health and safety services, and the fabric of our national transportation system will be at risk as well. New taxes and regulations on “the rich” will also mean higher costs or stunted growth for thousands of businesses that rely on GA every day.

Each of you knows that GA generally is threatened by user fees, onerous security regulations, and negative public perception. These influences threaten to shut down community airports, force hundreds of thousands out of jobs, and cut off billions of dollars in economic activity for small-and medium-sized businesses and communities.

Okay, so exactly what am I building up to here?....I’ll tell you in one word: advocacy!

Allow me to challenge each of you that doing all you do to keep the flightline open, the AWOS up, the fuel pit ready to go at a moment's notice is not the sum total of the responsibility each of you have – or we have as users of the GA system - for the continuing success of GA.

Advocacy is nothing more than getting the word out in such a way, so that folks have the reality of GA that is more accurate than the perception so many times created in the media and among grand-standing politicians who should know better.

You have a great message of service to share with folks. Whether it's with the Rotary in your area, the Lions Club, city councils or in the offices of your state representative or senator, that message needs to be told, and no one is better positioned than each of you, no, all of you in this room. And if you're not comfortable speaking in public – write a letter to the editor, send an email to your member of Congress or state legislator, publish a newsletter.

They might not hear one voice, but they can't escape hearing from the many – and that's the key to addressing the challenges in GA's path. With the right message, the very public policy makers who possibly will hurt us mightily when they create mandates based on misperceptions and misinformation, can be the folks who help GA with a solid and realistic understanding that, in some cases, only you can credibly share with them.

No one was better with the advocacy message than the late Norm Crabtree, whom I was fortunate – as most of you – to call friend. Many of you can still hear him calling an airshow from the flightline, or hear him tell you he was heading to Vinton County, "...where we're going to kill every chicken in the county for the weekend."

Although great memories – except maybe for the chickens – Norm is no longer with us to guide advocacy efforts for GA in a significant and positive way. It’s up to us now to follow his example in order to keep GA viable and viewed by the general public as the great service it is.

What is that message today; what drives us in GA? Universally, it’s that GA pilots and the people who support their efforts love serving those in need locally. This is an ethos that rings loudly across America. That is a powerful message, but only if it’s delivered. As you participate in this conference, do please keep that in mind this quote I came across recently, “General Aviation serves America. We serve...every day.”

Thank you for your kind attention this morning....