



FROM THE LEFT SEAT!

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FROM THE LEFT SEAT!

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EAA 461

EAA Chapter 461 is a
501(c)(3) non-profit
charitable organization
based at Bolingbrook's
Clow International Airport
(1C5)



Happy New Year Chapter 461!

As we land 2025 and prepare to get 2026 off the ground, I would like to reflect on some 2025 accomplishments and define some 2026 goals. Rest assured, I will keep this brief - I know many of you prefer not to be dazzled by my brilliant prose. (Okay, who am I kidding - nobody wants that.)

To put it mildly, 2025 was far more than a banner year for our chapter and our airport community. In fact, as I type out this list, there is a voice in the back of my head screaming "Hey! Don't forget XYZ!" Yes, I just admitted to hearing voices. No, the FAA is not aware, and I would appreciate it if we might keep it that way. Ssshhh...

Without further ado, here we go:

Jan: Rick Ernst's RV-6A received its special airworthiness certificate, we held our inaugural VMC and IMC club meetings, and our RedBird TD2 elevated our sim situation by several levels!

Feb: We selected Danielle Allen and Rowen Gonzalez as our 2025 Air Academy Scholarship recipients.

Mar: We attended Meadow Glens STEM Night and wowed the crowd as they experienced simulated flight by way of our large flight simulator and learned some of what is involved with building an airplane by reviewing RV-14A plans and parts.

Apr: We launched the 2025 Young Eagles season and did what we do best - shared the Spirit of Aviation with our friends and guests!

May: We achieved Gold Chapter Recognition Status and selected Danielle Allen and Trevor Klein to be our 2025 Ray Foundation Scholars.

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Jun: We participated in the 2025 Cavalcade of Planes where Rick Ernst wowed the crowd with souvenir aluminum airplane builds; Matt Hissem inspired young and old alike with his Mercury capsule, Gemini capsule, and Back to the Future Time Machine; and EAA's Ford Tri-Motor graced the skies above Clow. We also shared the bittersweet success of Dean Karafa's RV-14A build as we watched it depart Clow for its new home in Texas.

Jul: Oshkosh.

Aug: We had the tremendous honor of entertaining members of the USAF Thunderbirds Air Demonstration Squadron by showing them Chicagoland from a General Aviation perspective.

Sep: Our 2024 Ray Scholar, Mary Elizabeth Kurek, earned her Private Pilot Certificate!

Oct: We wandered (ambled? moseyed? sashayed?) up to the EAA Museum in Oshkosh, Wisconsin and hung with our friend Matt Hissem at EAA Space Day, then, a week later, we opened our hangar to greet our local and surrounding communities at the 2025 Haunted Hangar event.

Nov: We secured two Air Academy Scholarships for June 27 - July 2, 2026. More details will be out soon!

Dec: Thanks to Laura Marchese's advocacy on our behalf, we received a \$4,500 grant from Enterprise Mobility to support further enhancements to the chapter's RedBird TD2. I don't have the words to express how much we appreciate the Marchese family. Laura, John, and Jake - you are amazing!

In addition to all of the above, we continued to host our regular Hangar Nights on a weekly basis throughout the year. It is difficult to overstate the amount of effort, focus, and dedication that is required to keep a weekly program running, and yet Christina Ogan, John Tatro, Oz Kalan, Dante Gentile, and Rick Ernst make it look and feel almost effortless week after week.

Speaking of Hangar Night, I would like organizers and attendees to know we GREATLY appreciate their patience as we work through growing pains and strive to implement more structure around current and planned activities. The evenings can be a bit chaotic at times, and we are taking steps to bring more focus to the experience.

Thanks to Sara Gentile, Oz Kalan, and Dante Gentile, our Zenith CH650 build project is on a great path forward in terms of assembly, fundraising, and social media presence. If you are interested in participating in the CH650 project, please make yourself known! (CH650 Project Email: ch650@eaa461.org)

The 2026 Cavalcade of Planes is scheduled for June 6 & 7, and EAA has indicated we are likely to host the Ford Trimotor at its Clow tour stop from June 4 - 7. Stay tuned for volunteer information!

On a personal project note, I am happy to report that all of the quality concerns (laser cut and under-pressed parts) with my RV-14A kit were resolved amicably with Van's Aircraft. At this point I feel as though Van's has genuinely earned my restored trust, and work on my project has started up again following months of household repairs and renovations. I am also happy to report that my finishing kit arrived on December 23. So. Many. Things. To. Put. Together...

The voice in the back of my head is certain I have missed someone or something in my above list of acknowledgements, and I do apologize if it is, in fact, correct. The fact of the matter is we are a vibrant and active EAA chapter, and that is because of all of the amazing people - YOU - who volunteer the time and energy required to achieve our mission and goals. I thank each and every one of you for all you do to make our chapter an amazing place for all-things-aviation.

VFRs!

461 HAPPENINGS

@ CLOW

MONTHLY MEETINGS:

The Chapter meets on the first Thursday of the month at Clow International Airport, typically at the Illinois Aviation Museum starting at 7:00 pm. Family members, extended family and guests are always welcome.

HANGAR NIGHT:

Every Thursday evening from 7 pm to 9 pm we host a “hangar night” where we learn, we build aircraft, we socialize, and we work on our hangar.

No experience is required, no membership dues must be paid, and no expectations are set.

Come out, meet friends you haven’t met yet, see what the buzz is all about, and join in the fun!

YOUNG EAGLES:

We fly Young Eagles (kids ages 8 thru 17) on the 2nd Saturday of each month - April thru October - *weather permitting*. Starting at 9am and running till about noon.

CHOW @ CLOW

Join us Sunday evenings at 5pm for Food, Fellowship and maybe some Flying at the 461 hangar. Bring your own food as we hang out and wind-down the week!

THE BREAKFAST CLUB

@ CHARLIES

Come out to Charlies on Saturday mornings at 7am and have breakfast with 461 members. Some of these characters can even tell you about the other Breakfast Club they were apart of back in high school.

Airplane Factory EAA 461

Greetings from Airplane Factory 461!

Hangar 3 continued getting cleaner, safer, and neater looking in 2025.

The insulation is no longer falling from the ceiling, thanks to new strapping stapled to the rafters. It’s not the most beautiful solution, but it sure beats having fiberglass fall on your head or on your airplane. And all the old, unusable chemicals were removed from the flammable chemicals storage cabinet in the shop area and disposed of properly.

Tidying up the hangar is an ongoing effort—everyone can help!—and the reorganization of the area under and around the stairs is a big step forward. Lumber and other building materials, along with tables and chairs, are now stacked neatly on labeled shelves. A place for everything and everything in its place. For now. Please be sure to let a 461 officer or board member know before dropping off anything in the hangar. Clear space is needed for the many activities in the hangar.

John, Tony, and Rick

461 Hangar Posse

Rick’s Holiday Hanger Tips!

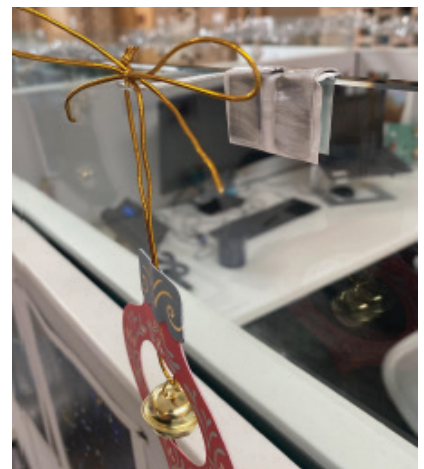
Holiday hangar tip #1:

.032 stainless steel safety wire makes a great way to bind together pine branches, to make a decorative hanging for your house. Wind some wire a couple of times around the branches, then demonstrate your skill with safety wire installation pliers to create a twist a few inches long. Bend the twist into a loop, and you have a very strong, corrosion-proof, airworthy decoration to hang inside or outside.



Holiday hangar tip #2:

2024-T3 sheet aluminum isn’t just for airplanes. Here’s a clip for hanging decorations from an office cubicle partition.





Chapter 461's 2025 Young Eagles Season was a solid year all around. With the help of dedicated pilots and volunteers, a lot of kids got their first ride in an airplane and a chance to see what flying is really about.

Young Eagles runs on people willing to show up and lend a hand, and 461 did just that. The smiles after each flight said it all. We're proud of the work done this season and thankful for everyone who donated their time, aircraft, and effort to make Young Eagles happen.



Young Eagles
2025 Season

461 Math

5 Rallies

+ 14 Pilots

+ Lots of
volunteers

= 212 Kids

flown and

another great

season!!



EAA's Young Eagles program, which over three decades has become the largest youth aviation education program ever created, is focusing its efforts on reaching 2.5 million Young Eagles flown by EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2026.

"From those first Young Eagles flights at Oshkosh in July 1992 to today, more than 50,000 EAA-member pilots have shared their time, aircraft, and knowledge to open the world of flight to young people," said Jack J. Pelton, EAA CEO and Chairman of the Board. "We now see its effect in developing two generations of pilots. We are now calling upon EAA members to reach the next big milestone of 2.5 million Young Eagles flown in the next 10 months and to celebrate this achievement with us at Oshkosh next July."

As of September 24, 2025, there have been 2,453,776 Young Eagles flown. Those Young Eagles have been flown in aircraft ranging from hot air balloons to corporate jets on every continent except Antarctica. The success of the Young Eagles program is also the foundation of EAA's expanding youth aviation education resources, which now include AeroEducate, Sporty's Learn-To-Fly course and Young Eagles Connect, the EAA Air Academy, and chapter-based Ray Aviation Scholarships.

"As I visit Young Eagles rallies, the volunteer leaders often tell me the same thing — there are plenty of eager kids ready to go flying, but more pilots are needed and always welcome," said Jimmy Graham, Young Eagles chairman and retired NFL All-Pro tight end. "We aviators all have had that one flight that sparked our love of aviation, so it's time to get involved and sign up to fly Young Eagles. You can make a difference — who knows where that young person could go because of your willingness to take them flying?"

EAA is offering recognition for Young Eagles pilots who join the "25 for 2.5" campaign to reach 2.5 million Young Eagles in the coming months. In addition, participating EAA chapters that assist in new volunteer pilot recruitment will be eligible for extra Young Eagles credits that can be used to obtain further resources for Young Eagles rallies or cover tuition fees of deserving youths for the EAA Air Academy residence camp held each summer in Oshkosh.

As we roll into 2026, EAA is announcing an additional incentive, and this one focuses on the recruitment of new Young Eagles pilots through the local chapter network. For every first-time Young Eagles pilot associated with a specific chapter, that chapter will earn an additional \$25 in Young Eagles credits. This incentive will run January 1, 2026, through July 31, 2026. These credits will be rolled into the 2026 Young Eagles credit earnings and made available in 2027.

As a reminder, any volunteer pilot that rises to the challenge and flies 25 Young Eagles or more from October 1, 2025, through July 31, 2026, will be issued a limited-edition commemorative hat courtesy of Sporty's. Pilots will be able to track their progress via EAA's website, as well as keep up with their fellow pilots' progress.

Now is your chance to say you played a role in history — I hope you join us! Learn more at EAA.org/Fly25YE.

Zenith CH 650

Build Project

By Dante Gentile



Our build project for EAA Chapter 461 has had a lot of success these past few months. Since our airports cavalcade of planes and after oshkosh, we expanded a lot and finished a few parts. Just before the holidays we finished both of the flaps for our Zenith 650. Along with building we messed up a few things and in return learned from our mistakes and improved from them.

One of those mistakes being after we finished the left flap we noticed it was rotating. After many attempts of trying to fix it we had to scrap it and start over. While this was a setback and very disappointing for our team, we figured out what we had done wrong and fixed it for the new one. Just 2 weeks later we were able to build a new flap and have it be perfect.

For current updates we are just starting the ailerons. While these are very similar to the flaps there are a few extra pieces that we are talking to Zenith about. Once we figure these complications we will hit the ground running with the ailerons and next the elevator. We hope to finish all these parts come spring time. We are looking forward to help youth learn behind the scenes on how planes are built, teaching STEM and advance thinking skills.



ICYMI - here are 2 articles from Rick Ernst published in SportAviation Magazine November and December 2025



MEMBERCENTRAL

MEMBERS/CHAPTERS IN ACTION

Souvenir Aluminum Airplanes for Airport Visitors

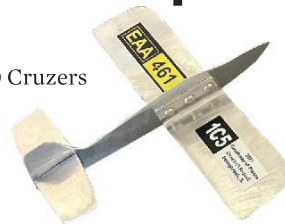
BY RICK ERNST, EAA 418493

I AM A SERIAL builder, having completed about 250 Van's RV-6s and 150 Zenith 750 Cruzers over the past three years.

The first weekend of June, Clow International Airport in Bolingbrook, Illinois, puts on the Cavalcade of Planes, our yearly airport open house and air show.

In the EAA Chapter 461 hangar, we have a number of activities for our visitors (mostly nonaviation-focused residents of Bolingbrook and surrounding towns), including "How Do You Build an Airplane in Your Garage?" presented by my wife and me. Claudine shows folks the steps in constructing an aluminum airplane (cutting, drilling, dimpling, riveting, etc.), while I build souvenir aluminum airplanes with them, allowing visitors to squeeze the rivets.

I tell people that there is no charge for the airplanes, but they are obligated to listen to me talk about aviation. This is a fantastic opportunity to tell the nonflying public of all ages what we do as pilots, builders, and EAA members.



If you'd like details on how you can do something similar at your chapter or airport, contact me at rick.ernst@eaa461.org.



MEMBERCENTRAL

WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE BUILDING/RESTORING



My 1,560-Week Wonder

Illinois Van's Aircraft RV-6A

I'M A FOURTH-GENERATION PILOT and third-generation A&P mechanic, so there was never a doubt that I would eventually build my own airplane. Sure, I had worked on projects in my restoration shop, but starting my own project from the beginning would be something very different.

Over the years, I have read (eagerly!) many articles that begin like that. But that is not my story.

My 30-year journey to completing a homebuilt airplane was not a direct route, but I suspect it will seem familiar to some. For me, stops in construction were the rule, not the exception. My project and I moved several times over the span of the build. And for many years, my shop was a dark, uninviting garage. But I finished the build, and the result is a terrific Van's RV-6A.

Possibly the only aspect of my project that took a direct route was my decision to start it. After working my way through the certificates and ratings up to CFI, I knew how to fly but knew little about the airplanes themselves. Like many pilots, all I knew of the engine was what I could see through the oil-filler door. I needed more, and building an airplane was the next "rating" to pursue.

In 1993, I attended a sheet metal workshop given by RV-6A builder John Shoemaker, which gave me the confidence that I could build an airplane. Some stick time in John's RV made it clear that the -6A was the airplane for me. (Advice to would-be builders: Find your own John Shoemaker or attend an EAA SportAir Workshop. And make sure you're building an airplane you know you'll like.)

The following year, I moved to Conway, Arkansas, and started my own -6A, with a two-bedroom apartment as my shop. I tried to do

the noisiest work on weekends, but still, I can't imagine what my neighbors thought. Applying corrosion protection in my spare bedroom was probably not the best idea, but I did get my security deposit back. With no air compressor, I could only squeeze rivets, which meant that a lot of the riveting would have to wait. I alternated work from stabilizer to elevators to rudder, back and forth, leaving each assembly unfinished. Such was the start of my nonlinear project trajectory.

By pure chance, I met RV-4 builder Howell Heck. Howell generously provided shop space — and compressed air — so I could finish riveting those tail surfaces, a year after starting them. More importantly, he got me to stop overthinking and to start doing. To the extent that my build was successful (and it was!), I have Howell to thank. (More advice: Find your own Howell Heck; they're out there, and they would like nothing more than to help you.)

I am happy to have built my airplane from a slow-build kit. Even back in 1995, Van's offered prebuilt wing spars, but I could not pass up the opportunity to save a few dollars and use what is now among my favorite aircraft tools: the sledgehammer, used to set the large rivets in the spar. The wings were completed, and I started the fuselage by early 1997 — and construction stopped completely for over a year. I changed jobs, changed careers, moved from Conway to Chicago, and married Claudine.

We moved into an apartment that thankfully included a one-car stall in a three-car garage. The garage was convenient, but with no heat, poor lighting, spiderwebs in the rafters, and crumbling brick walls, it felt like a cave. We shared the garage with our upstairs neighbor, but strangely, he never once asked about the airplane.

continued

**Stick with it.
It's completely
worth it.**



Stranger still was the 55-gallon barrel labeled “Boneless Beef Navels” in his part of the garage. In spite of the surroundings, Claudine was always willing to help. With a bucking bar and hearing protection, she contorted herself into the tail cone and underneath the instrument panel, while with the rivet gun I created the sonic equivalent of hitting a garbage can with a baseball bat. (More advice: Make your shop at least a little comfortable. Remove all meat products from the shop area.)

After 12 years working in the cave-shop, we moved the RV, now with an engine and landing gear, to our new house. My planning was not perfect: I discovered that the horizontal stabilizer on an RV-6A is just a couple inches wider than the garage door opening, but a simple 27-point turn allowed us to extricate it. Surprised neighbors showed up to take pictures, previously unaware of the airplane down the block.



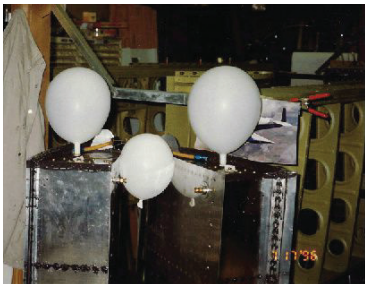
Ironically, in my new, clean shop, progress slowed. I began feeling that because I didn't have everything I needed to complete any assembly, I couldn't do anything. Claudine came to the rescue as always, reminding me, “You like the process of building, right? So what if it's not completed? You still like building.”

Nine years later, we moved the RV to EAA Chapter 461's hangar at Clow airport (1C5), for final assembly. This time, I discovered that the landing gear on the -6A is just a bit wider than the opening on the trailer I'd rented. With all the help and encouragement I could ask for around me (even if I didn't always take advantage of it), progress accelerated. With two other RVs under construction in the same hangar, we dubbed the hangar “Airplane Factory 461.”



I finished construction of N921CR on September 27, 2024, 30 years to the day from when construction began. First flight was on April 30, 2025, and flying 1CR was every bit as thrilling as I had hoped it would be back in Conway in 1994. I just completed my task-based Phase I flight testing and am looking forward to a lot more flying. (My last advice: Stick with it. It's completely worth it.)

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EAA 461

Thank You to all those who contributed articles and photos!