

## **AMPS history: A collection of Art Silver's recollections**

### **Chapter I: In the beginning**

The organization that we now know as the Aero Modelers of Perrine started around 1959 as small group of around three dozen. Pete Hendricks and Bill Phinney headed this raggedy bunch. The club had very specific membership rules; it only took two votes to keep someone out of the club. This kept the membership very small and limited.

The two combined, were truly a political powerhouse. At the time that they were in control, they had rammed through a by-laws rule that they could keep anyone from becoming a member by the use of a two-nay vote policy. When a prospective new member was up for a vote and they perceived him to be a possible problem, they would both cast a nay vote thus eliminating him from the possibility of membership. We lost a lot of potentially solid members. The first year that I was a member, I was asked if I would run for vice president. At that time you couldn't be president if you hadn't been a member for less than one year. The vice-presidency was, as is now, mostly ceremonial. If anything happened to the president the VP advanced to the presidency. At that time, it was the only way I could take a shot at the president's position. This was Pete Hendricks big mistake. We had fewer than 25 members and a couple of hundred dollars in the bank. The next year I was approached to run for the presidency. I took on the challenge. It seems as though the club was ready for change and I was elected. My first order of business was to repeal, through club vote, the two-nay vote rule from the by-laws. This turned out to be a pretty nasty battle. There was still a group that truly wanted to run the whole show. In the end, the rule was repealed. My relationship with Pete Hendricks was never really the same. We were, however, still friendly to each other and enjoyed each other's company.

When the two-nay vote was repealed, it really gave the club the kick in the butt it needed. As our membership soared, so did the treasury as well as the enthusiasm of the group. We brought in "hundreds" of new members along with the dues monies that came with them.

After a couple of years we were pecking on 300 members and had thousands of dollars in the treasury. The big problem then was that we only had 7 or 8 radio frequencies to use. The frequency density was a real problem. Imagine 300 members, trying to fly on 8 frequencies. At that time we couldn't use all of the frequencies due to interference. Being one of the largest clubs in the state, we contacted AMA about the problem. They were already working with the FCC to remedy the situation. The problem was getting pretty bad, so the club placed a cap of 300 on the membership. I was opposed to the cap because I felt that the AMA would solve the problem in a relatively short time. It took about 2 years but the FCC granted us more frequencies going up from 8 to 34. That was the relief that we needed. We left the old color-coded frequencies and went to the

numbered ones that we use today. With the older system we had to license all of our radios with the FCC. With the hobby growing at the rate that it was, the FCC abandoned the rule and deregulated our use. They later expanded our available channels to the 60 something that we have today.

Our next big problem was that we really didn't have a secure flying site. By that, I mean we could lose any field we had at the will of the owner. This became my newest quest. We needed a place to call our own. We looked for years but couldn't find a suitable location. What we needed was 5 acres in the middle of 150. We searched and searched. At that time we were leasing a 5-acre parcel at SW 100th Street, all the way west of Krome Ave, with our backs to the canal. Everything went well for three or four years until people started buying up the land around us and started building houses or fencing in their property to pasture horses. I can't tell you how many times a member had to climb the 6 ft. fences that were almost surrounding us, in order to retrieve his downed airplane. We finally saw the writing on the wall and decided to look for a new site.

## **Chapter II: Lindberg's Landing**

I kept thinking to myself that if we could only get in to use Lindberg's Landing, it could be the best thing since sliced bread. One Sunday while we were flying and pondering the field problem, I mentioned my thoughts about Lindberg's. One of the members, Tony Silveroli, involved in the discussion, stated that he knew the owner of most of the property over there and that he would go over and talk to him. I said, "Can we go right now?" He responded with, "Why not." Off we went. The man's name was Mike Lally. Mike was a couple of years younger than me but was, at that time, heavily into the real-estate business. I mentioned the possibility of leasing a piece of the runway there. He didn't want to have anything to do with a lease but said we could use the property if we would keep the runway mowed for him. This was no little job. The runway was about 150 ft wide and one mile long. All we really wanted was the first 400 or so feet. Mike then added that he would furnish a John Deere tractor and a bush-hog mower. All we had to do was put someone in the driver's seat. He even paid for the fuel as well as giving us a place to store the club mower.

Before we could fly at our new "dream field" there was a lot of field maintenance that was necessary. At that time, Tom Cornell was either Vice-president or secretary/treasurer, at any rate his ass fit very well on the tractor that Mike Lally had provided. We began to mow, and mow we did. The bahia grass was about a foot tall when we got there. Bahia is used on runways because it is very tough and can take the beating that repeated landings can bring about. We mowed and mowed. As I mentioned earlier, the runway was 150ft wide by 1 mile long. You wouldn't believe the hay that was made by our cutting. It was all Tom and I could do, using the big tractor, to push it all to the edges of the runway. When we were finished, we had a beautiful field of 4" deep Bahia grass. The problem was, that was way to high for model use. We decided that we would

mow the West 400-500 ft down to a usable 1" height. What we found out was that when you take Bahia down to 1", there really isn't much grass left. What we had was 500ft of BALD runway. We figured that Lally would have a shit fit and run our asses off the property. But, as luck would have it, the rains started and we found out that you really can't kill Bahia. After about 2 weeks, we had a Beautiful green runway.

Now our big problem was the "Bad Boys" R/C club that was active about a mile and a half from us. They flew at the glider port. At first we didn't believe that the frequency problems we were having was because of them. But it was. I pondered the problem and decided that I would pay them a visit. Since the FCC had just increased our frequencies from about 8 to almost 34, I proposed that we adopt a frequency-sharing plan. Our club volunteered to pay for any frequency changes that were necessary for both clubs. At that time Futaba made us a deal to do the job for \$25.00 a radio. The Bad Boys agreed to the proposal. They polled their membership and decided that they really didn't need the 12 frequencies that we proposed and that all that was necessary was four of their choice. They were and still are a great bunch of guys. I don't think they ever submitted a single bill for changes that were necessary. Our club was a different story. We probably laid out about \$500 to change out AMPS members. This is the reason we have the



X'ed out frequencies at our field to this day. (Ed. Note: The Bad Boys R/C Club ceased to exist around August 2005 when the Glider Port property was sold and the new owner closed the flying facilities)

We had a glorious 4 years at Lindberg's. We held our first, what is now our "Big Bird fly in" there. It was called "The Bill Phinney Jumbo fly in" in honor of a fallen comrade. After several years the name was changed, to the "Big-Bird". We had porta-potties and

a telephone. When the word spread around about the facility, our membership soared to over 300. We had a few frequency density problems, but they were not to bothersome. That is when we started to keep track of the numbers of members on each channel. When you bought a new radio you would check the frequency density list to see the least used frequency and buy that one.



With 300 members the club decided to put a cap on the membership. I fought the proposal but the membership prevailed. This is when I did an end run and came up with the probationary membership that I think we still use. All was well until Harry Moskowitz arrived on the scene. I think that was his

name. When I say all was well I found out that there was still a rumble in the distance. The problem was noise. The real estate at Lindberg's was starting to sell and new homes were going up. As the people moved in, the noise complaints started. We limited our earliest flying time to after 9:00 AM and that helped out for a while. But as with all homeowners associations there were a few condo commandos that were always around. This is where Harry comes in. One star filled night he decided to take his girl friend out to watch the midnight R/C flying. When they found out that nobody flew at night they decided to...! One of the homeowners saw his lights in the middle of the runway and decided to check it out. What he found was Harry and his girl friend having a good time. They had a big argument and this was the straw that broke the camel's back. The next day, the combination lock was changed on the gate and a, "NO MODEL FLYING" sign was posted. That was it for Lindberg's!

### **Chapter III: The Potato Field**

When we became persona non grata at Lindberg's Landing, I thought life, as we knew it, was over. I thought about where we might secure another facility, but anyplace else paled in comparison to Lindberg's. I spoke to some of our members but all the sites we found had one problem or another that would eliminate it from the list, until I mentioned the problem to a long time friend and new member, Karl Sickle. Karl told me that he had an idea and said he'd be right over. If I remember correctly, I was homebound with a newly broken wrist and taking a rough ride through some of South Dade's potato fields was the last thing I wanted to do, but, "do it", we did. We wound up in the east glades at the potato field of a friend we had in common. His name is Ed Castonguay. A potato farmer with a love for J-3, Piper Cubs who had a strip adjacent to his packing shed. It was actually 50' by 800'. It was a little narrow but plenty long. All we had to do was sweet talk Ed into letting us use the place. Our Ace in the hole was the diesel tractor that the club purchased while we were at Lindberg's. The tractor that Mike Lally let us use to mow his runway was a piece of garbage, so we bought our own.

Getting back to the story, I had a meeting with Ed, at which time I asked him what it would take for him to let us use his place until we could find another suitable location. He pondered for a minute or two and said he didn't know just what it would take. I made my first offer... "How about we keep the runway like a golf course at no cost to you"? Hell, he practically jumped into my arms. We had a good long run there, probably four or five years. Then came Hurricane Andrew. As you might remember, it tore the hell out of everything in South Dade. Unfortunately Ed's was one of the places that had major damage. We could have stayed there but with the loss of so many members from the Homestead area the geographical center of our membership was probably somewhere between Kendall Drive and South Miami. A lot of the guys expressed their unhappiness with the long drive so we started the search for another site that was more satisfactory to the majority of the members.

## Chapter IV: AMPS Field

One day, I decided to stop at Hobby Nut, our local Hobby Shop, to see how they were doing after having been wiped out by Hurricane Andrew. Donna Ray was there. She was one of the owners with Clark Hopkins. As a passing note she mentioned that she had seen a piece of land that we might be able to use for a new flying field. I said, "Let's go see it!" The next day she took me out to the location. There it was, 5 acres in the middle of 150 (actually 165). The thought crossed my mind that maybe we could "buy" the property. When we got the price, I kind of figured that it was pie in the sky. Where would we get \$55,000?

At that time, Orange Blossom Hobbies was the largest hobby shop in Dade County. Donna and Clark were very big customers of Orange Blossom. One day when Orange Blossom's salesman, "Augie", came in for his weekly order, he asked how everything was going with the AMPS. She told him that we were looking for a new field and that we had found one, but it was for sale and the price was beyond our means. At that point she jokingly said, "Why don't you get your boss to buy it for us"? He took her seriously and said, "OK, I'll run it by him". About a week later, I got a call from Lou Quick, the owner of Orange Blossom. He said, "I hear you want me to buy a flying field for the AMPS Club". I told him that I thought it would be a nice gesture on his part if he would. HA! I was about to wet my pants. He was serious! We had a couple of meetings at which time he laid down his conditions and I laid down ours. We agreed on all points, however he told me that all he could afford was \$40,000. We had about \$25,000 in our treasury, so I told him that we would make up any short fall and we would still agree to all of his terms, if he would still agree to ours. After that we would let the lawyers "cross the tees and dot the i's". He said OK and that he would get back to me in a few days. What can I tell you? To this day, I'm still waiting for his call.

After a couple of weeks and no call, I assumed the deal was dead. I didn't know what we were going to do. Then I got a call from the president of an R/C club in South Miami. He had heard about our finding a new location and indicated that if we didn't secure it for the AMPS, he was going to personally purchase it for his club. They were located just to the west of Braddock Senior High and a builder was building new homes all around them. Now, was the time to act. I contacted the First National Bank of Homestead. They had had our account since the club was founded. The Losner family was very good friends with my family. William Losner, the president, said that he would be happy to lend us the money if the board of directors, as a whole, would personally guarantee the loan. I have to admit that the idea wasn't all that pleasing to me. However, I just couldn't get the idea of owning our own field out of my mind. Then one day, out of the blue, I came up with a plan. "Why don't we borrow the money from ourselves"? It was just a short time after Andrew and we were all flush with insurance money. I'll bet I could sell shares in a mortgage on the property. The more I thought about it the better it sounded. I couldn't wait until the next meeting. The plan was to sell 40,

\$1000 shares, paying 8% interest and an amortization of 10 years. We would pay off 1/10 of the amount plus 8% of the unpaid balance every year, until it was paid in full. At that time, the property would belong to the AMPS. Some of the members wanted to lend the whole amount and some couldn't afford to participate. The response was so great, it was decided that every member would be allowed to buy one share and, after the first round, if there were any shares left, we would hold a lottery for the remaining shares. We allowed one month for the shares to be sold. When we counted the shares at the last meeting we had sold all but one. A man, from the back of the room, stepped up and handed me a check for \$1000. He said, "I'll bet you can use this" and then disappeared. I don't think I ever saw him again. I know his name, but I don't believe he is still a member.

In the 20 years I was president, I had a lot of political fights that I didn't win. I was called names by some of the disgruntled members. But I think the thing that bugged me the most was that all of the members were invited to the closing on the property but nobody showed up... just the lawyers and me. The bottom line is, we are one of the few clubs in the state that owns its own field. The loan was paid off 2 years ahead of schedule and the mortgage was ceremoniously burned. I wrote, and presented to the club, a satisfaction of lien and the rest is history.

## **Chapter V: Life after Art's presidency**

More to come...