

Caught in the Searchlight: Bill Lewis



In this feature in Flypaper, on an occasional basis, we highlight a club member on a rotating basis. While we see each other at the field or at meetings, we may not know a lot about the other members, their personal background and their history in RC flying. Searchlight should help us get to know one another better.



A memory of Bill Lewis I will always have is of my first visit to the LCRCC field. Newbie as I was, and hoping I wouldn't embarrass myself too badly, I drove up and unloaded my heli. Bill must have known that I was new, and he came over and introduced himself. He told me about the club and the monthly events. He also showed me the club's trainer planes and said that club members were happy to help new people learn to fly. We talked for quite a while, and his warm welcome made me know that I wanted to become a member. And now, as we all know, Bill will be leaving the area and moving to Tennessee. He will be missed.

Bill was born in Kenosha in 1943 and has been a lifelong resident. He graduated from May D. Bradford High School in 1962 and worked at a series of jobs for the next few years.



In 1969, Bill was drafted. As he tells it, he was waiting in line for the transport to take him to Viet Nam, when an officer came by, tapped ten GI's on the shoulder and made them step out of line. Instead of going to Viet Nam, the ten were going to Germany. When he got there, he was assigned to a battery control center for Pershing missiles, a job which required Bill to get a top DoD clearance. Bill found the job to be interesting and enjoyed being in Germany. Since he was older than most of the other GI's and so he didn't go to bars with them but instead became friends with a number of Germans. He returned to the states in 1971.

His initial job out of the service was with Ocean Spray Cranberry where he served as a mechanic/electrician/jack-of-all-trades. After 8 years, he left to go to Chrysler as a skilled-trades millwright where he stayed for 27 years, the last 8 years in the capacity of safety training officer.

Bill and his wife of 20 years, Mary Ann, live in Kenosha, at least for the time being. Bill has four children.

Bill first flew U-Control planes when in the early 1960's but obligations of work and family took him away from the hobby for a while. He did however, have a big basement, and over a winter built two 16' x 16' train tables and was occupied with model railroading for a while. But, he says, then spring came and he didn't want to be in the basement.

He returned to flying, but this time with an RC Hobbico 60 trainer. He buddy-boxed for a few flights, but then, as more than one of us have, he took it up and crashed it. Undaunted he bought three more trainers, but this time, he bought Armadillos which were made of corrugated cardboard and almost indestructible. He was flying at Bong State Park and did for about four years. He made quite a few friends there. He became aware of the Lake County Radio Control Club and joined. About three months later, the club was booted out of the Ninth Street location.

When LCRCC moved to its current location, he recalls, there was only the East-West runway and the flight stations were on the small rise on the north side of that runway. He says that it was hard to land from the East as the pilot might be staring into the sun and there was a down slope to the West so it was hard to stop the plane on landing if the pilot didn't know what to do. At the time, Bill had a 60 size Big Stik and a U-Can-Do, an 84" wingspan mid-wing. Over the years, he has had 30-50 planes. When asked which one was his favorite, he says, "The big ones – they're better."



His current favorite is pictured at the top of this article, Pilot 330 Extra, with a nine foot wingspan, powered by a GP123cc gas engine. When asked about his most satisfying experiences while flying, he

says that happens every time he lands a plane without crashing. He counts as one of his most amazing moments, a time when he was flying a SIG Somethin' Extra, and he tried a maneuver a little too low. He says that he was headed straight down, and was just about to crash, when he gave it full up elevator and it pulled out no more than a foot from the ground.

