

Pilots recreating historic 1929 air tour

By CRAIG PIECHURA

It must've been a hardy bunch back in 1929 that barnstormed the state in the first Michigan Air Tour.

Now, 50 years later, Michigan pilots are celebrating that aerial anniversary with a 1979 Commemorative Michigan Air Tour June 11-15.

They will visit 68 cities throughout the state to celebrate commercial and recreational flying.

Many antique planes will fly in the event, including an old open-cockpit Stearman biplane. In addition, some of the pilots who flew 50 years ago will be participating in the event as copilots.

Robert Lyons of Lathrup Village is chairman of the '79 Michigan Aeronautics Commission (MAC) air tour. He said the event is open to all 17,000 pilots in the state.

Fifty persons, half the allowable number, have already made reservations to participate in the air tour.

During a chat 3,000 feet above the Prudential Town Center in Southfield, Lyons said the air tour is a friendly excursion, not a race or a derby.

"It's a chance for the little guy, the weekend flyer, to participate in a bit of history," Lyons said.

Lyons and Gini Sutherland of Birmingham were two of the first people to sign up.

"We'll be visiting 68 cities, give a plaque to the director of each airport and visit with the local pilots who come down to see the aircraft," Lyons said. It's quite an energetic tour."

Mrs. Sutherland will share the flying with her husband, Neal. They own a Cherokee 180, while Lyons pilots a bigger, high-performance Beechcraft Bonanza.

Mrs. Sutherland is active in an organization for women pilots called "The 99s." She said the group got that name because there were 99 women pilots around when the group formed in 1928.

The 99s are spearheading a drive to teach private pilots' spouses how to land a plane in an emergency. The training is for people who often fly as a passenger in a private plane but aren't licensed pilots themselves.

Lyons has been flying since the service in World War II, but he will be far from an "old-timer" in the air tour.

Mary Creason, MAC coordinator, said two people who flew in the 1929 tour, Mary Von Mach and Talbert Abrams, have signed up as copilots.

A number of antique airplanes will travel around the state. Among them will be the open-cockpit Stearman Biplane, piloted by Bill Barber of Ann Arbor, a North Central Airlines representative.

Also scheduled to fly is a 1941 Aerona Chief, a two-seater; a 1946 Ercoupe; a Detroit-made Stinson that is judged to be 40 years old; a 1947 Cessna; a Porterfield airplane and a Rearwin Sportster, both dating back to 1939; and a replica of Charles Lindbergh's Ryan monoplane, the Spirit of St. Louis, entered in the air tour by the Experimental Aircraft Association.

Mrs. Creason said she is negotiating with United Airlines to see if they'll bring in their first air mail airplane, the Swallow.

Local pilots already signed up for the

five-day excursion that stops in Grand Rapids, Mackinaw Island, Marquette, Saginaw and Lansing on subsequent nights are:

Merle Frame of Troy, Michael McGough of Southfield; Charles Hoke of Bloomfield Hills; Robert Eitelre and Mark Wayne of Southfield; Bill Brown of Canton Township and Dr. J.O. Sullivan of Plymouth.

ENTRY FEE for the tour is \$35 for the pilot and aircraft and \$20 per passenger. The fee covers membership in the non-profit MAC 50th anniversary Association, costs of conducting the tour and banquet expenses. It does not cover flight costs.

Lyons will accept applicants until 100 are received. Enter by sending back with a letter listing the type of aircraft you'll be piloting, the 'N' number of the aircraft, its cruising speed and the number of passengers to: Dr. Robert Lyons, Air Tour Committee, c/o Michigan Aeronautics Commission, Capital City Airport, Lansing, Mich 48906.

Pilots and passengers will follow one of three different routes but rendezvous at the same city each evening. All entrants will depart June 11 from Pontiac Airport — the state's busiest air terminal, including Metropolitan.

The vacation-commemoration will terminate at Lansing's Capital City Airport on June 15, where a banquet will honor James Ramsey, retiring director of the Michigan Aeronautics Commission.

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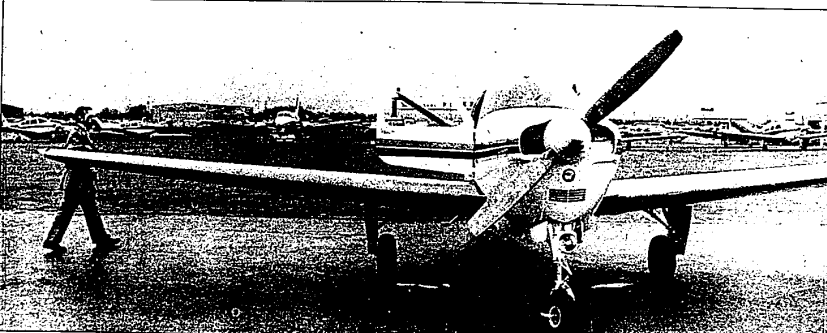
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Lyons inspects his plane thoroughly before taking off from Pontiac Airport. (Staff photos by Gary Friedman)

Receives badge

Pvt. Paul E. Fekety, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Fekety of Farmington recently received a parachutist badge upon completion of the three-week airborne course at the U.S. Army Infantry School in Fort Benning, Georgia.

During the first week of training, students undergo a rigorous physical training program and receive instruction in the theory of parachuting. The second week they receive practical training by jumping from 34-foot and 250 foot towers. The final week includes five static line parachute jumps.

Fekety entered the Army in September of last year. He attended Michigan State University in Lansing.

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