

# STREET SCENE

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers  
Richard Lech coordinator/591-2300

Monday, April 20, 1987 O&E

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BILL BRESLER/staff photographer

Scott Soenen of Plymouth gets ready to send his kite for a ride on the winds.

## Working on those KITE MOVES

By M.B. Dillon  
staff writer

True or false: Kites are for kids. If you answered true, go to your room. And don't mention your belief in the company of anyone from metropolitan Detroit's 5/20 Kite Group. (Winds 5-20 mph are optimum for kite flying, and the club was founded May 20, 1976 — hence, the name.) Our members are all adults ranging in age from their early- to mid-20s on up to — well, some of the members I've been fond of have died of natural causes," said club president and accomplished kite creator Bruce Jarvie.

SAYS SOUTHFIELDED'S Pat Gilgalon, a kiting pioneer and owner of The Unique Place — World of Kites store in Royal Oak. "The United States is the only country in the world where kites are treated like a child's toy. Everyone has childhood memories about kites. But once you have a good kite in your hands, it's a totally different world."

"Kite flying is an adult sport all over the world, not just in the Orient, but in Germany, France, Holland and throughout Europe," she said. "It's considered a family sport." You won't get an argument from the Soenens of Canton Township. "It's something our family always does," said Ann Soenen, who sells kites at the Rainbow Connection in Plymouth. "My husband (Ilyn) started the whole thing. It's a good father and son activity. It gets them together."

"What's so exciting about the sport is the feeling of flying. There's something absolutely fascinating about having something in the air," said Gilgalon.

"Peaceful relaxation" is what lured Jarvie to his hobby. "I, for one, wish I could fly like a bird. I can't do that, and I'm a little bit out of shape to try hang gliding. The next best thing is to fly my creations, and I get to stand on the ground and feel like I'm controlling them," said Jarvie, 35.

Some older 5/20 fliers "enjoy coming out with stable, well-mannered, no-effort kites, setting up lawn chairs and sitting under a tree with a fishing rod so they don't have to play with them much."

The younger people enjoy stunt kites. They're very active — you're wrestling with the sky," said Jarvie, who's clocked his stunt kites at 50-60 mph, just before the kite skins failed. It's not unusual for Jarvie to pilot simultaneously 18 kites at the end of two strings, "maneuvering them around like model airplanes in figure eights."

The kites are pulling back at you

with as much as 150 pounds of pull. I've been able to stall the kites out, lay down, and under full power, the kites can literally pull me right back up. And I weigh 220 pounds," said Jarvie, in whose car at least one kite always is on standby.

FOLKS ON BELLE ISLE and at other spots frequented by 5/20 fliers sometimes are treated to the aerial spectacle of kite fighting. Fighters are small, highly maneuverable, single-string kites. By design, they're unstable and unbalanced.

"Through selective line control, by releasing the line and pulling it back in, you can take the instability and turn it into directional control."

The kites are exceptionally fast when they're stable, and as such, you can shoot them around the sky very quickly and accurately to any place you wish to put them," said Jarvie, a designer/programmer with a tem-

perature instrumentation manufacturer.

"In actual fighting, two people try to attack each other's kites. It gets to be a dogfight."

"In India, where fighting was invented, they use ground glass on strings to try to cut the other person's kite strings. Those people, I understand, will carry two dozen kites with them, because odds are they'll meet someone better than them."

The 5/20 group, comprised of graphic artists, police detectives, IBM salesmen, dentists, Air Force people, machinists and pharmacists, among others, often compete at conventions.

It's a thrill to get "30-40 of some of the finest kite fliers in the world flying at the same time," said Jarvie.

"The sky is decorated with these spots of color that weave around and interact almost like a school of fish, for if the wind shifts, the entire pattern goes with it," said Jarvie.

ONE OF JARVIE'S favorite team flights occurred in Columbus, Ohio, at night.

"We hung campers' glow-stick lights on the kites. The wind was so perfect they hung beautifully. It was almost as though a new constellation had been formed, only it was so low you could almost touch them," said Jarvie.

"You could only see the lights. It was quite a sight. People who didn't know it was kites thought they were UFOs and called police."

"The police enjoyed it so much they called in and said they were on break," recalled Jarvie.

Less tame are some winter kite flights on Lake Erie.

"Our fellow kites in Pennsylvania like to go out on the lake with skates or snow skis, flying stunt kites," said Jarvie.

"Because the kites are 200 feet up, they can steer them downwind with two strings and tow themselves like an ice boat. I've been told they get quite a look of shock from ice boaters who look up to see someone who's standing up passing them."

While different kinds of kite flying appeal to different folks, "virtually every kiter I know is fun. I'm almost tempted to say kite fliers in general are some of the most friendly and helpful people on earth," said Jarvie.

THE 5/20 KITE GROUP meets the second and fourth Sundays of the month, March through October.

The next flight is scheduled 1-5 p.m. Sunday, on Belle Isle's Lighthouse Pointe.

For more information, write to The 5/20 Kite Group, P.O. Box 47257, Oak Park 48237.

## Rules to fly by

Few pastimes are as free-wheeling as kite flying. But that doesn't mean there aren't some ground rules.

You shouldn't fly kites near power lines or heavily traveled roads.

Flying near airports is forbidden. And if your kite weighs more than five pounds and is to be flown higher than 500 feet, you're required to file a flight plan with the FAA.

The FAA requests but doesn't require that you notify them if you plan to loft your kite more than 50 feet.

Using metal or plastic monofilament line can be dangerous. So can flying in the rain, or when clouds look threatening.

The 5/20 Kite Group passes this tip along: "When two or more people fly kites over the same field, sooner or later the kite lines will cross and possibly loop around each other a few times."

"Stay calm. Take your line spool over to the other flier and hold the two spools together. The kites will continue to fly normally, and the line tangle will slide right down the lines to your hand."

"You can then untangle the lines and continue to enjoy your kite without having to ground it."

## Inside **S<sup>2</sup>**

### Off the wall

The ball — and sometimes the players — go bouncing off the walls during the frenzy of a wallball game. This relatively new sport puts the action of volleyball in the confines of a racquetball court.

### Blinded by the light

Artificial-sun worshippers sometimes disdain using goggles in tanning booths because they don't want "raccoon eyes." But it's better to have eyes that look funny than eyes that can't look at all.

### Tornado alert

Although they do a fine job of eliminating irksome wicked witches, tornadoes generally are an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Our science story looks at what tornadoes are and how to protect yourself from their fury.

### U2 for you

The Irish rock band U2 had folks standing in line for tickets for its upcoming Pontiac Silverdome show. One local Irishman, though, recalls U2's humble beginnings.

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## Kite tales date all the way back to ancient times

By M.B. Dillon  
staff writer

You probably wouldn't think twice if you saw a kid flying a kite. But a kid flying on a kite?

Legend has it that in Egypt centuries before Christ, kids did just that.

One story tells of "two small, brave boys who were trained as part of a monumental bluff put up by the Grand Vizier of Assyria," writes Wyatt Brummitt, author of "Kites."

"He had been ordered by his Pharaoh to build a palace in the air, somewhere betwixt heaven and earth."

"The Vizier took (eagle-shaped kites) and their small riders to the Pharaoh and sent them aloft. He had coached the boys to call down to their ruler, 'Hail Mighty One! Here we are!' — the sky, ready to begin

your palace. Bring us stone and mortar!"

"The Pharaoh decided that his true duty to his people was firmly on the ground, and promptly canceled his order."

The likes of Benjamin Franklin and Guglielmo Marconi later made their own kiting headlines.

Franklin in 1752 flew a kite during a storm to prove that lightning carried electricity. The outcome was the lightning rod.

When Marconi sent his first trans-Atlantic wireless message from Cornwall, England, it was picked up by a kite-suspended aerial in Newfoundland.

SUCH KITE TALES are old hat to