

DAUPHIN COUNTY

Aviator's aspirations take off

Local author inducted into Experimental Aircraft Hall of Fame

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As a child, he dreamt of flight.

And in his heart, Mike Markowski said he knew one day he would soar above the clouds.

But little did he know at the age of 5 that his adventurous spirit would lead to a successful career in aviation.

Markowski worked as an engineer for three major aircraft companies. But at the age of 25, he decided he would never work for anyone but himself again. He established the first hang-glider-production company on the East Coast in the early 1970s and



Mike Markowski

founded Aeronautical Publishers, a publishing group dedicated to aviation and model aircraft. The company is based out of his home in South Hanover Township, Dauphin County.

Markowski has published numerous books on the history of flight, ultra-light aircrafts, home-built airplanes and model planes. The 60-year-old Steelton native was inducted into the Experimental Aircraft Hall of Fame today in Oshkosh, Wis. The honor recognizes someone whose contribution to aviation has had a dramatic impact on the evolution of flight, said Elissa Lines, vice president of commercial and donor relations for the association.

Markowski feels the same today about flight as he did the first time he went up in a plane, he said.

"The first airplane ride I ever had was when I was 10 years old in Millersville. When we were up cruising, the pilot let me take the controls, and I felt like I could turn the world," Markowski said.

Tom Peghiny, president of Connecticut-based Flight Design USA, a company that imports small, foreign-built aircraft, nominated Markowski for today's induction.

The two met in 1972, when Peghiny was 16 and Markowski was 25. Markowski took

his hang glider out one day to fly it off a hill in Framingham, Mass. Peghiny was out flying his remote-control airplane nearby. And when he saw Markowski set up his hang glider, he introduced himself.

"It was a truly serendipitous moment," Peghiny said. "After that, I immediately started doing nothing but working on hang gliding."

Markowski worked in a NASA jobshop at the time in Massachusetts and said he heard there would soon be layoffs. He volunteered to lose his job because he wanted to start his own hang-glider-production company. That's what he did on Jan. 1, 1973.

Though Markowski said he feels he was destined to fly, he had to earn his wings. In high school, he knew his chance at attending college was slim. His father was a teacher, and his mother was a stay-at-home mom. There were four kids to feed and no extra money, he said. He decided to pursue a scholarship via the Capital Area Science & Engineering Fair.

In 10th grade, he developed a wind tunnel, much like the ones aircraft manufacturers use to test airplane designs. Markowski tested model-airplane wings in his wind tunnel. He perfected his project in 11th and 12th grades and took first place in the state's science-fair competition his senior year.

The honor earned him a four-year scholarship to Penn State University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering in three years.

"When I was a senior, I got (job) offers from the big three: Boeing, Douglas Aircraft Co. and Sikorsky Co. in Connecticut," Markowski said. "I chose to go to Douglas in Long Beach, Calif. and lasted there three months. It was too fast paced, and I was homesick."

Markowski called Sikorsky to see if the position he was offered was still available. It was, and he took it. Although he would still be a good distance away from home in Connecti-



PHOTO/SUBMITTED

Mike Markowski flies his Eagle IV Sailing hang glider. His aviation and self-help publishing company is based in his Dauphin County home.

cut, the job designing wind tunnels brought him closer to Central Pennsylvania and paid a higher wage, he said. He worked for Sikorsky until he was laid off in 1970.

He then worked on the F-15, B-1, and the space shuttle. That was his last job working for another aerospace company. After he started the hang-glider company, he was offered a contract to write a book on the sport.

Markowski moved back to Central Pennsylvania at the end of 1975 to focus on writing his book.

The 488-page *Hang Gliders Bible* was published in 1977 by the now-defunct TAB Books, based in Blue Ridge Summit.

The book sold well, and Markowski started a mail-order business to help sell it. He got another contract with TAB in 1978 to pen the 576-page, *Encyclopedia of Home-built Aircraft*. It was one of TAB's biggest sellers, he said.

Not long after, McGraw Hill purchased TAB, and McGraw Hill asked Markowski to write a book on ultra-light aircraft. He took the company up on its offer but canceled his contract to publish the book on his own. Markowski sold 22,000 copies the first year, he said.

Aeronautical Publishers, his firm, has printed 35 books, eight of which Markowski wrote.

Markowski is in the midst of writing a three-book series of memoirs he hopes Hollywood taps to produce a film, he said.

Looking back, Markowski said he is thankful his grandfather gave him his first wooden model airplane at the age of 5.

"That plane flew into the air like a homesick angel," Markowski said. "Onward and upward." ■