

Micro(phone) Management

A first-timer's view from the stage at the world's biggest air show

Dan Newland

There I was on stage with more than a hundred pairs of eyes looking at me, preparing to hold me in judgment. I felt alone. Would I remember everything? Would the projector work? Were all of my samples there? Was my fly open?

While it sounds like the start of a nightmare, I was instead standing at a podium in a building at Wittman Regional Airport. Seeing all those faces out in the audience, I wondered just what I was thinking when I volunteered to lecture at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2004.

This was my third trip to OSH, and sadly, I went by commercial carrier. Some would argue that the *real* EAA AirVenture should be experienced by making the trip in a small aircraft and landing at Wittman, dealing with the air traffic coordinators, ground taxi personnel, and impromptu arrival parties.

Two years ago I had the fortune of making the trip from Buchanan Field (CCR) in Concord, California, aboard Paul Marshall's new Bonanza, and it was incredible. Of course, the two days of fly-fishing in Mon-

tana with the Marshall clan along the way was something you couldn't do by commercial carrier—and was a real plus. These are what lifetime memories are made of.

This trip was different, though. Unlike my previous trips, this year I was lecturing. I have 37 years of composite experience, but this time I was lecturing on how to make aircraft interiors quieter, because in addition to composites, I have been

designing commercial aircraft thermal and acoustic insulation for the last 11 years.

For 2004, I arrived in Appleton and then met up with the Marshall gang once I was in town. In addition to Paul and his brother-in-law (and Piper Cherokee jockey) Dick Filson, my old friend and former boss Andy Marshall was there, this being Andy's 19th consecutive year lecturing on composites.



in the spotlight

Andy is a former VP and head of the Hexcel Ski division, has been a pilot for 70 years, is the author of *Composite Basics* and numerous technical articles, and was given the title of “father of honeycomb cored composites” by the Society for Advanced Material Processing Engineers. Yet even with those 19 years under his belt, he is a short-timer compared to many of the wizards who lecture at EAA AirVenture.

So what was the attraction of speaking at Oshkosh? What brought me 1,500 miles from the San Francisco Bay Area to Wisconsin? What had I gotten myself into?

First, the very process of getting ready

ahead of time, shipping them, and getting them delivered to the presentation center in the morning to hold until I was ready to go.

Then I had to lug this mess into the tent, load the computer, lay out samples, and try to learn the computer remote. This may be old hat for the old-timers, but when I got to this point my calm was quickly evaporating. It was at this time that I really appreciated having a few

friends there to help me get set up. Oh, and lest I forget, I was trying to look calm while doing all of this and not break into a sweat from hauling 50 pounds of stuff in the heat.

My first session as a lecturer was something of a revelation. I never appreciated what went on behind the scenes until I was part of it. To the first-timer, what becomes

apparent early on is how well organized and smooth-running Oshkosh is. Outwardly it appears to be pure chaos, but once you start working with the folks running the show, you realize how monumental the task is and also how great a job they do.

I enjoyed the show as an observer prior to 2004, but now I was a participant. This made me appreciate Oshkosh a whole lot more, and I found that I felt a little bit like Dorothy looking behind the curtain in the *Wizard of Oz*. You suddenly are seeing Oshkosh on a whole different level.

From the scheduling to the way the helpers drive you around with your equipment in the John Deere tractors and quads, Oshkosh is all about organization, friendliness, and being helpful. It could not happen any other way and be what it is.

Prep Work

Leading up to the show, I spent a

lot of time on this presentation. Anyone who has done a technical lecture can appreciate that, without any exaggeration, for every minute in the lecture I spent about an hour of prep time. As my time approached, I was feeling pretty good about the upcoming talk.

However, one thing I hadn't counted on suddenly hit me. I realized I was going to be speaking opposite the air show that started at 2:30 p.m. Here I was opposite many of the world's best air show pilots in one of the world's premier air shows. And I happened to be speaking at the same time they would be performing.

I began to mentally prepare myself to be lecturing only to my friends. Trudging up to the session's area, it was with no small amount of dread that I began to think about the horror of nobody showing up. But when I got to the building, a few folks were already seated and more started to trickle in. Then more. And more still, and many more until beyond my wildest dreams, the hall was not only packed, but there were more than a dozen people standing along the edges. The handouts I had prepared and carted were gone in about 30 seconds. The talk went well, with people hanging around until long after the 90 minutes allotted to me, so I was pleased and relieved to have had a successful session (even if I did have to wait a few times while the warbirds went overhead).

And like Wal-Mart tracking the buying habits of its customers, EAA volunteers monitor every session and do a head count to determine which sessions are well attended and which are not. You are invited back the following year if you have a good crowd, and you might even be given a larger accommodation. I was quite satisfied to be asked to return in 2005 because my session was so well attended.

I don't know what this year will be like, because you can only have

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to speak at Oshkosh is intimidating. Depending on your presentation, you may have a lot or only a little material to get prepared for your lecture. But before you can even begin, there are forms to fill out, acceptance of your presentations, preliminary scheduling, and then final scheduling, plus making arrangements for travel. And after you've done all that, you have to deliver on your promise.

My preparation and materials were a bit larger than most because I had printed out 75 pamphlet-sized copies of the presentation (this was to prove inadequate) and prepared a number of samples that were representative of a fuselage section. This meant preparing them weeks

a “first time” once. Will it be as exciting (and nerve wracking) as the first time I lectured? Probably not. But then again, I know I can improve on what I did and perhaps help some more folks when they decide to try to make their aircraft more comfortable.

I do know that I won't have to do as much work as with my first lecture, and I'll probably be able to not miss a beat when I pause to let the AT-6 formation go by if I'm opposite the air show again.

The Question Remains

But that still doesn't answer the question as to why I went through all of the work of putting on a session when I am not only doing this free, but also have to pay my way in.

The short answer is I don't know exactly. For me, Andy Marshall is part of the reason. He has been my mentor for more than 20 years. His vast knowledge, speaking skills, and joy of meeting people have certainly had a strong influence on me. Seeing many of the same faces in his sessions that have become his friends is part of it, too.

Some of it is thinking that if I know enough about something and can present it well, I could help someone in his or her project. And perhaps it is because I know that when I am up there, I am surrounded by people who share a passion about flying as much as I do. Or maybe it is just in our nature to want to teach. But regardless of the reasons, I think wanting to talk to other people who share a common love is just in our blood.

Perhaps in a few years, I will have amassed enough folks attending my lectures to where they, too, become familiar faces. When we meet again each year, we will stop, shake hands, say hello, ask how the show is going, and ask each other if we have been flying lately. Then later, as an old man, maybe I'll be watching the new kids lecturing and facing their first audi-

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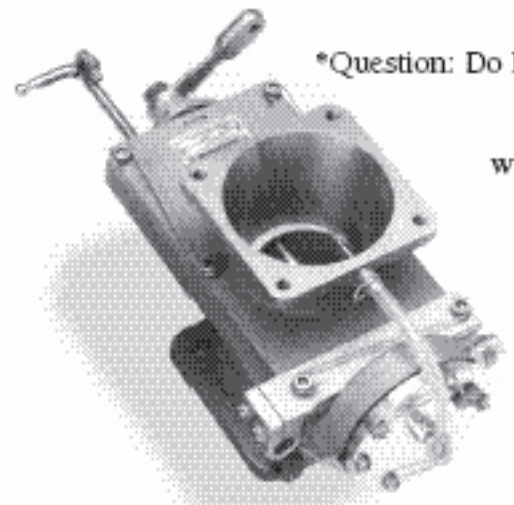
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ence, nervously thinking, "Why am I up here?"

And as a wise person, I'll sit back and smile, remembering how it was when I first stood there worrying how I would do on my first lecture.

In retrospect, being a presenter is a lot like Christmas. What you get back is greater than what you give. There's a sure satisfaction to be found in sharing your knowledge with others and have perhaps a few folks leave thinking, "Hey, there are some good ideas; I'm glad I came." It's rewarding to have people come up after the session, thank you, introduce themselves, and ask questions. It is an affirmation of the knowledge you may have spent a lifetime obtaining. In the end, you may have made a difference and helped make someone's dream a step closer to reality.

Just about everyone has some area of special knowledge he or she can share with others. I would recommend you think about sharing your expertise with others and giving your own presentation. It will be the beginning of a whole new chapter of your Oshkosh experience, and one that you are not likely to ever regret.

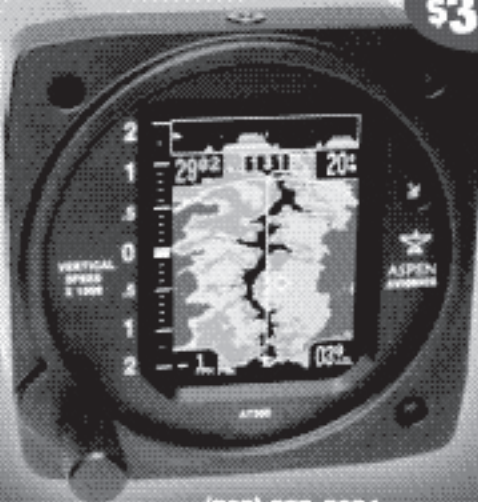
But that brings to mind that EAA AirVenture isn't just an air show. It is a constantly evolving monument to aviation, and it is a legacy to our future in flight. It is humbling to think that in giving of ourselves, we can be a part of that.

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