

Birmingham Aero Club Skywriting - A Collection of Aviation Stories

March 2006 Member Profile

Mike Brewer

By Michael W. Davidson

If you're near the Shelby County airport around sundown on a pleasant evening you may find new member Mike Brewer flying a wandering path in his Cessna Skyhawk, enjoying the magic of flight and the beauty of the Alabama countryside. While some may fly for transportation and others as a profession, Brewer will quickly tell you he flies strictly for the pleasure received from being aloft in a small airplane.

A Birmingham native, Brewer's talent with the saxophone earned him a scholarship to the University of Montevallo where he majored in music. Having concerns over earning a living with a degree in music, he later changed his major to Mass Communications. Upon graduation, he started in the television industry as a floor director for Birmingham's Channel 42. He describes his first job as "The guy who tells the talent where to look, runs the teleprompter, and then cleans up when the show is over." He soon became a director and after three years at Channel 42 he moved into a director's job at Channel 6 for such morning TV classics as the "Country Boy Eddie Show" and "Tom York's Morning Show." Brewer's talent in this very demanding job was soon recognized, and he quickly moved to directing prime-time news. After a three-year stint at Channel 6, he moved to Martin Advertising to direct television and radio commercials, a position he has held now for twenty-two years. Today he produces commercials used nationally for Pontiac and Cadillac automobiles.

Brewer's interest in aviation was sparked in college when an acquaintance gave him a ride in a Cessna 172 based at the Bessemer airport. Attracted by the challenge, sense of accomplishment, and means of escape provided by flying, he soon started flying lessons himself. Aircraft rental was a bit more affordable in 1977 than today, and his weekend routine became working on Saturday delivering parts for Hatfield Auto Parts in Homewood and then using his wages to pay for a flying lesson at the Bessemer airport on Sunday. He also worked as a lineman at the Shelby County airport for Larry Chapman for a period of time during 1978.



Chapman was a Cessna dealer at the time and Brewer recalls nearly-new Skyhawks being sold at what now seems an unbelievable price – \$15,000 - \$18,000.

After finishing his Private Pilot's license, Brewer's flying throughout the 1980's and 1990's was limited to only a few hours a year. He owned a leaseback Cessna Skyhawk and Piper Warrior that were rented at the Birmingham airport, and also flew radio-control models. While Brewer claims there was no significant exposure to aviation during his childhood, two of his siblings are heavily involved in the aviation industry as well – Darryl Brewer is Line Services Manager at Jetsouth and Steve Allen buys and sells turbine and jet aircraft.

In addition to his aviation interests Brewer also enjoys classic automobiles. He has owned seventeen Corvettes ranging in model years from 1954 – 2003. In the days when most non-professional mechanics have abandoned working on their own late-model automobiles due to their complexity, he takes pride in continuing to perform his own repairs. A recent drop in oil pressure in his Mercedes-Benz was no big deal for Mike; he just towed the car home, dropped the oil pan, and replaced the oil pump.

Brewer's interest in aviation was again sparked a few years ago when he happened upon the BAC's "Gathering of Eagles" event at the Shelby County Airport. BAC member Johnny Ward, Sr. was offering rides in his Ercoupe and Brewer was taken with what he calls the "eccentric" character of this antique airplane. He found it fun and easy to fly, and felt so at home in it he promptly bought a share of the airplane. Wanting something a bit bigger and faster than the Ercoupe, he also entered into a partnership with fellow BAC member Jim Cawthon in his late-model Cessna Skyhawk. Brewer describes the Skyhawk as a plane that is "good at everything but not great at anything". He likes owning a late model airplane due to the reliability and earned his instrument rating in the airplane last year. His instrument checkride was 28 years to the month after his private – with the same examiner, Jim Saltzman.

The scarcity of hangars in the Birmingham area, along with Brewer's extensive experience with investment condominiums on the Gulf Coast, inspired a project now underway with partner Jim Cawthon to construct "condominium hangars" at the Shelby County Airport. Pilots will have the ability to buy their own individual hangars as a part of a shared twelve-unit building. Brewer and Cawthon were right on target regarding demand for this service - all twelve units were sold well before groundbreaking started for construction.

When asked about favorite flying trips, the soft-spoken Brewer recounts a trip with pilot-friend Lynn Simons in his Mooney to West Virginia last year. The play of the sun on the clouds created a dazzling array of colors which Brewer captured with a digital camera. Reflecting on this trip, he says "I got my instrument rating so I could fly where angels fly." When asked about what has kept him involved in the aviation community, Brewer thoughtfully stated "Airplanes are special, airports are special, and the pilots are special – they are just a cut above."

Mike resides in Hoover with his wife Linda and their son Justin, a sophomore at Oak Mountain High School. Another son, Jason, is a professional photographer living in Birmingham.