

TCRC Lands On A Permanent Field

by David P. Andersen, February 2015



TCRC is the oldest RC club in Minnesota, started in the 1950's as The Hot Watts when radios had vacuum tubes and relays. The Hot Watts flying field is now the Mall of America, a huge shopping center. After many moves, the club decided that in order to have a permanent home, the club must own the land, at least 40 acres, with overflight and retrieval privileges on adjacent land.

A field search committee was formed. Many potential sites fell thru for strange reasons. One farmer, miles away, claimed that the airplanes would make his bull infertile. Another neighbor testified that our airplanes can rain flaming gasoline from the sky. Another said we would cause too much automobile traffic and that we will hold wild parties late at night. When we asked a councilman why the city council responded to these silly claims, he replied, "These people live here and vote, you don't."



Pilots behind a protective fence.



But sometimes it floods.

After two years of searching and many false starts, the club finally found its home in the floodplain of the Minnesota River Valley. Floods are usually in the spring when the snow melts. But flooding is a long-term benefit because, by law, the surrounding land cannot be used for homes, roads or any permanent structures. The area is zoned agricultural and recreational and includes sport aviation. Neighboring land is a national wildlife refuge. Nothing can be constructed in the floodplain that would pollute or interfere with the flow of water during floods. For this reason, the shelter has no walls, just poles. The outhouse is movable, and the club's tool shed and tractor are stored on high ground nearby. Standing water fills low spots with silt, keeping the little airport smooth and flat.



Pole shelter provides a view and shade.



Ski flying in the winter.

When the field is under water, the club flies off the parking lot of a nearby fairground. And other RC clubs in the area accept TCRC members as guests during these times. Minnesota Nice is an unwritten field rule.



Air Show poster, 1976



Preparing for engine start in the pits.

TCRC raised funds to purchase its flying field by holding air shows at several locations around the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. They featured Snoopy Versus The Red Baron, Beulah the Flying Witch, a flying lawnmower plus lots of aerobatics, sailplanes and formation-flying to music. Some performances attracted two thousand visitors.

As a non-profit corporation, TCRC signed a contract for deed with a 30% down payment. Additional funds were raised by sponsoring an annual auction. For a while, some members loaned the club additional funds. The club had only 50 members at the time.

Then the unexpected happened—the state of Minnesota claimed the land for a park expansion using eminent domain. But the state paid generously for the club’s land, enough to buy an even better flying field nearby. If the club had been renting, we would have lost everything. This confirmed our decision to own rather than rent.



Model Aviation Day.

Pilot discusses the previous flight with his airplane.

The annual auction and the air show traditions continue. Every year, TCRC sponsors Model Aviation Day in which the neighbors are invited to the field for a show. Food and buddy box flights are included. Neighbors, skeptical at first, now say we are an asset to the community.

The Minnesota River Valley is a major flyway for migrating birds. For a while, TCRC risked losing the field if our models interfered with the well being of the birds. Baby eagles in a nearby nest would sometimes look up when one of our airplanes took off. That nest produced the largest brood of bald eagles in the valley for three years in a row so we were relieved when a state inspector said we should “keep doing what you are doing.”

From the air, the little airport can look like a full-sized airport. To prevent confusion, there are large Xs painted on the ends of the runways, a signal to pilots that the runways are closed to full-sized airplanes. Nevertheless, hot-air balloons

and ultra-light aircraft have landed at the TCRC field with permission, much to the delight of the modelers present.



Today, the TCRC field has two 200' x 45' paved crossing runways with runouts onto short grass. A third runway is very short grass. Pilots are protected by short fences between the runways and the pilot stations. Paved taxiways lead to pit areas having nine starting benches. A gas grill and picnic tables are inside the shelter. Club members take turns mowing the grass with the New Holland tractor.

Lessons learned:

- Finding a field is a lot of work. It requires a team effort.
- Avoid land that requires a zoning variance.
- Own, don't rent.
- Inform air traffic control of your location.
- Maintain good relations with the neighbors.

For more, please visit the club's web site at www.tcrconline.com.

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