

If it's in the Newsletter, it must be true...

Maine Powerchute Association

Newsletter

June, 2007

www.mainepowerchutes.org

MPA member fatally injured

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of one of MPA members, Red Higgins.

Red was a newcomer to our sport, and while flying a single seat 103-legal aircraft, he ended up in the trees. He did not appear to sustain any injuries from that event, however when he tried to climb down from the tree, one of the branches broke and he fell about 40 feet.

He was airlifted to Eastern Maine Medical Center, where he remained on the critical list for several days with severe head injuries as well as multiple internal bleeding injuries. While he regained consciousness for a brief period, he eventually died on May 29th from the many injuries he received from the fall.

Red was 66 years old, and owned and operated Red's Cycles in Searsport. He is survived by his wife and daughters.

If you'd like to make a donation to his family, as a number of our MPA members have, mail your contribution (most have sent \$10 or \$20) to Bonnie Micue, who will make sure it gets to the family. Her address is P.O.Box 13, Warren, ME 04864. Our organization also made a donation of \$100 from our membership dues.

On behalf of all the members of the MPA, we extend our sincere sympathies and condolences to Red's family.

Lessons learned from the accident

While we regret every mishap, accident and incident that we experience, there is always a lesson for ourselves and for others from the event. The horrible situation that befell Red Higgins has a number of lessons for all of us.



Red Higgins' powered parachute in the trees at Belfast.

We do not exactly know what caused Red to fly into the trees. According to Dunbar, who checked his layout before he took off, and then witnessed the whole event, Red made what appeared to be a normal take off at Belfast. When he was about 20 feet in the air, he made a left turn, still climbing, and flew straight into the stand of poplar trees on the edge of the runway without appearing to try to correct his path.

We'll probably never know if he had mechanical problems, or if he had a medical problem, or if he just got confused - he had very little flight experience - it was his third or fourth flight. All his flights were solo in his single seater 103 legal powered parachute.

Anyway, once he flew into the trees, his chute got caught in the branches and pretty well suspended him there. Another friend of his (as well as Dunbar) told him to just sit there while they went to get some help to get him out of the tree. However, Red decided he could climb down so he unbuckled his seat belt, got out on a limb, and then as the branch broke, he fell to what would prove to be his death.

It is very difficult to climb out of a powered parachute in a tree, since it usually sits at a weird angle. You also do not want to move around much, since you may dislodge the aircraft from its precarious perch, and then more bad things can happen. It is far far better to stay still – maybe VERY still – and wait for a firetruck with a big ladder to give you a much better chance of surviving.

By the way, some of our members do carry a 75 feet coil of thin but strong rope. While you may not want to use it to climb down depending on your position in the trees, the rope may serve you well to secure the craft to the tree in case it is about to come loose and fall to the ground.

Another little trick our PPG friends use is to carry a small container of dental floss. No, not to use it climb down, and not to give your teeth a thorough cleansing since you don't have anything else to do for a few hours, but to drop one end to someone of the ground and then use it to haul a rope up. With the rope, you can maybe climb down, or at least secure the aircraft.

The other lesson we may extract from this unfortunate incident is the value of training. While the new FAA rules regarding sport pilot licensing may seem like a lot of hassle, it does force us to give and receive much more thorough training. Flying is a difficult skill. although a powered parachute certainly is more forgiving and easier to learn, it is still an aircraft that can kill you if you don't respect it and exceed its limitations or your limitations or your skill level.

Unfortunately, it appears that Red did not have the experience needed to control his aircraft in an emergency. Since he was flying a single seater, he never had any dual instruction. He did not have the hours with an instructor in the back seat to give him confidence that comes from the repetition of the various flying skills necessary to be in full control of your plane.

That is why the FAA now mandates 12 hours of training for Sport Pilot, of which 10 has to be dual instruction. Again, unfortunately, there is no requirement for training if you are going to fly a 103 legal plane by yourself. The FAA logic for that is that if you want to hurt yourself, that's your business. But that's not quite valid, as every time someone does end up in a tree or gets hurt or worse, we all receive the bad publicity that goes with it, and we're all viewed as not quite safe to have around.



Norman Rockwell would have painted this if we could have fitted a little boy and a fishing pole and a dog into the back seat somehow...

Winter wrap-up

Well, we tried a number of times to get some decent flying in during those past couple of cold months, but it just didn't work out. That doesn't mean that nobody flew, it just means that they enjoyed getting back on solid ground (or ice) more than they enjoyed being in the air.

We tried getting to **Knox Country** airport several times to hold our usually popular fly-in there, but the weather kept canceling us. We finally did get a mini-fly-in at that location the last weekend in May – OK, let me correct that – we did have the standard MPA 4000 calorie breakfast, and one guy did get to fly for 5

minutes, so in a strict technical definition, we did have a fly-in.

A similar scenario took place in **Winthrop** on the lake. We had about 4 chutes and about 7 MPA members there on a beautiful but very windy day – it started out calm, but by the time everybody finished their beauty sleep, the winds were ridiculous. So, once again, one of our guys went up for about 8 minutes just to show everybody it can be done, and then quickly landed while it was still possible.

And yes, exact same scene at **Moosehead Lake** in Greenville at our official winter fly-in – see exciting pictures below. One guy flying, the rest laughing – 5 minutes later, it's all over.



Typical scene from some of our fly-ins lately – 4 guys to hold the chute, one guy to fly it while holding on to the tubes very tightly.

The hibernation is over!

All the bad weather that we could want for the season we already had, so from now on, nothing but blue skies and calm winds! Isn't that a country song? But, we are ready!

So let's cross our fingers and toes and head out to **Deblois** this weekend (Friday evening, June 8th) and hopefully stay until Sunday. If you haven't been, Deblois is a fun place to fly – generally no other traffic around, lots of forced landing areas, and some unique country side views.

Two weeks after that (June 22nd through 24th) is the ever-popular fly-in at **Hampden**, courtesy of Jeremy Williams and his lovely and talented wife Sheila. This year, Jeremy is



Actual picture of an MPA cheerleader right after her first flight

planning an even better event, with a band, bon fire, flying time set aside for PPCs only, and other fun events. See directions on the web – but it's on Rt. 69 in Hampden, just a few miles off the interstate.

Then we're right up to July 4th extravaganza in **Eastport**. Unfortunately, the 4th falls on a Wednesday this year, so it's a little difficult to have a long weekend out of it. We'll try to do our usual fly-over on the 4th for the breakfast and celebration at the airport and in town. Our fly-in is scheduled for the 3rd through the 5th, but we can camp out at the airport well before that, as well as after that.

On the weekend of July 21st, we will try to hold our annual **Top Gun weekend** – we're not sure of the location yet, but mark your calendar for that date. More on that event in the next Newsletter. Oh, and one more thing - start practicing!

Gobel passes FAA Examiner school

After a week of stressful and rigorous schooling in Oklahoma City, Gobel defied the odds and actually passed the course so now we have a Sport Pilot Examiner for PPCs in New England. The course took its toll, as Gobel is only 29 years old but he now looks at least 60. But it was worth it, as now we don't have to travel to Florida or Michigan to get a checkride.

For those of you not quite up to date on the whole FAA licensing process, here is how it works:

- An FAA Certified Flight Instructor (CFI) is authorized to provide flight training in a PPC for the purpose of obtaining your Sport Pilot license. When he thinks you are ready for the

check ride, he must endorse your log book certifying that you received the necessary instruction, both ground and in flight.

- An FAA Designated Pilot Examiner (or a Sport Pilot Examiner (SPE), as they are called for the PPC and Sport Pilot) will then administer a practical test, which consists of an oral examination (about 60 to 90 minutes), and a flight test (about 30 to 45 minutes). If you pass the exam, he can issue you a genuine FAA Sport Pilot license.
- Each pilot holding any type of FAA certificate (i.e. Sport Pilot, Private Pilot, Commercial Pilot, etc) must receive a biennial examination (every 2 years), which consists of about 1 hour of oral training and 1 hour of flight training. A CFI can administer this test.

We still have one little problem. John Gobel is also a Certified Flight Instructor, but he cannot examine his own students, so we need at least one other CFI in PPCs in this area. When we have that, the other CFI can provide the final endorsement, and then the Examiner can administer the practical test. Randy Autrey is studying for his CFI test, so when he completes that, we should be all set in the New England area for powered parachutes.

DUES – it’s that time of year again

Wow – it’s June already. And it’s time for one of the best bargains around – your \$20 membership dues to the Maine Powerchute Association.

OK, so it’s maybe not as good a bargain as say a “buy one, get one free” clearance sale deal at the Kittens-R-Us store, but it’s still pretty good. Even though our irreverent Newsletter has taken a short break here lately, it will be back in full swing once again starting now so you can catch up on the PPC world news, on lame humor, and cute pictures of ladies who want to be PPC pilots but don’t know it yet.

In addition to getting the coveted Newsletter in hard copy, you also get to go to our general

meetings (hmmm – still not turned on?), and get first-hand news about what really goes on at our fly-ins (not necessarily a pretty picture!), and you get to go our famous Christmas party, and get to fly in our Top Gun event, and best of all, ...ahh...ahh... well, there is no best of all. Wait - oh yeah, we have a lot of fun!

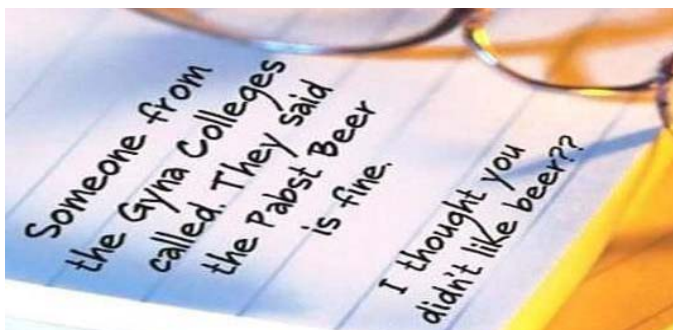
So, send your \$20 dues to our extraordinarily skilled Treasurer, the lovely and talented Bonnie Micue at P.O.Box 13, Warren, ME, 04864.



Our newest MPA member on her way to her first fly-in. I think she'll fit right in.

MPA general meeting at Hampden

Our first real general meeting of the year will take place at the Hampden fly-in at Williams field on June 23rd. We'll discuss all sorts of stuff, get a financial report, elect new officers for the coming year, plan our annual flying adventure, and do the usual laying around in the sun while pretending to be paying attention to what's being discussed. I love the MPA!



Why men shouldn't take messages