

Air Venture 2021
After Action Report
By Paul Bryant

This year's trek to Oshkosh, Wisconsin was truly a memorial one. A very close friend of mine asked to tag along as this would be his first Air Venture and a bucket list check off. After considerable bantering between me, myself and I, the decision to drive outweighed the flight option. We hit the road early Saturday morning on July 24th and stayed the night in Smyrna, Tennessee. Up early the next morning with a stopover in Terre Haute to visit my friend's family. We arrived there around noon time and were treated to pizza, fresh tomatoes, cucumbers and Indiana corn; a really pleasant visit.

We arrived at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh around 10:00 am on opening day. We got our room keys, bus transportation wrist bands and headed out to the air show. The only covid restrictions throughout the entire week was the mandatory wear of masks while on the city owned busses. If you were vaccinated, there were no requirements to mask up.

The first order of business was to give my buddy, Phil, a rundown of the layout of the grounds. Quickly followed by a trip to the Blue Barn where we erected the Chapter's directional sign. This was my first trip to the Blue Barn and it was really a nice place to visit. It was pretty much the chapters' focal point.

The staff quickly got the screw driver drill out and we were able to get our



Chapter's sign high up on the post. Surprisingly, there were already several

mileage signs attached to the signpost. I will say the sign we put up looked



really nice. We were also able to place a location pin on the huge map of the United States pointing to the location of individual chapters who were able to attend this year's event. Later in the week we would go back to the Blue Barn to pick up a very special award for one of our very own chapter members.

The welcoming spirit was quite obvious from, not only the EAA staff and hundreds of volunteers, but also all the myriad of folks attending the week-long airshow. I was told that there were thousands of campers already there and by the quick scanning of the grounds I could easily agree to that. In the past, I noticed the number of airplanes parked on the grass was



huge, but never really reached the end of the field. This year was different. This was Monday afternoon and planes were parked all the way to the perimeter of the airport to the south and, of course, all the spots on the north were also filled. This was going to be a fun week!

I wanted my friend Phil to see the size of Air Venture, so we jumped on a tram and went from the blue barn at the north end of the field to the ultralight area to the south.



When we jumped off and walked around a little, none of the ultralights were flying. The wind was a little too much for them. However, the helicopters were flying and we got to see a couple take off and land. The announcer was describing the type of helicopter, its characteristics and announcing the name of the pilot. What happened next could only happen at Air Venture. The announcer called out the name of the pilot flying the Rotorway Talon and, low and behold, it was a close friend of Phil's. They hadn't seen each other for at least 20 years. Greetings and handshakes out of the way, Phil got invited to go for a flight right there on the grounds of Air Venture....what a thrill!



Monday night, we were able to hook up with an old Air Force buddy of mine and we all went to dinner. The Italian food was great and the hangar stories and jokes around the table made for quite the enjoyable evening.

After a good night's sleep at the University dorm, we got a great breakfast at the university dining facility. This is a phenomenal eatery with everything you could imagine eating for breakfast on the menu. When you come out of the dining facility, the bus transportation is right there and whisks you off to the main entrance to Air Venture. This was the only time everyone was required to wear a mask.



Tuesday's schedule would be a trip to the EAA Museum. What a fantastic place to visit. It has everything an experimental builder, or any aviation enthusiast for that matter, would want to see. While in the museum there was a young girl and her brother absorbing all the aircraft and



history of aviation displays.

We happened to stop by the wind tunnel display and I asked her if she understood the pictures of the wind tunnel. I explained to her what the engineers could determine with all the data they received from wind tunnel tests. She was so in-tuned and intent on learning all about this. It was truly a nice moment for me to see her mind totally open for learning. This young gal will certainly be an aviation giant when she becomes an adult.



This was an amazing day and we headed off to the university for another good dinner and a well-deserved sleep.

The next morning, Wednesday, I was preparing a little speech I had planned on giving at the EAA Young Eagles Award Ceremony later that afternoon. We had walked a lot of the flight line looking at all the experimental aircraft, the vintage aircraft, the



war birds and the ultralights. There certainly were a large number of aircraft present.

Easy to say hundreds and

hundreds of them. No airshow goes by without a model or two so we were able to catch a few poses. Of course, Phil loves the Velocity, so he just had to take the pics...!



As the day wore on, it became increasingly clear some severe weather was heading into Oshkosh. Unfortunately, the night airshow and the Young Eagles Award Ceremony, I just mentioned, were cancelled. They did reschedule the night airshow to Thursday night, but the Young Eagles award program was not. That night, from the safety of our room we watched the severe weather roll in. For 2 hours straight the lightning show was incredible. Every other second there was a lightning flash. We were able to watch the radar from our iPad and, as amateur radio operators, able to listen to the local Skywarn net for Oshkosh. The worst portion of the weather was, fortunately, southwest of us and the Air Venture Grounds. Many of the campers had to evacuate to the museum and other sound structures as a precaution. Fortunately, we all dodged a bullet.

So, on Thursday we decided to go through all the vendor areas. There are 4 major hangars where the majority of the vendors set up shop. This year's vendors were plentiful. I didn't see a single open spot which is really a good sign we are back in business. We also went to the "Fly Market". That area was also chuck full of vendors. It was really great to see everyone out in force. It was also a fun

shopping day and we actually bought several things. Later that evening was the night air show. Now this was truly one of the major highlights of the entire week. Incredible aircraft and helo flights performing with all kinds of lights and some of them with fireworks shooting off to the side. Then a huge fireworks display synchronized to music with incredible bursts of explosions and a 1000-foot trough filled with flammables lit at the same time the explosions went off! A sight to witness. If you ever get to go to Air Venture, the night airshow is a definite must. This was one of the highlights of the entire week.



As we started to wrap up the week, we were told a trip to the seaplane base was well worth the trip. So, on Friday morning we took a shuttle over to the seaplane base and weren't disappointed. This is a little lagoon area that the seaplanes operate into and out of. We watched several of them take off and land. It is a very scenic and quiet place with a really laid-back atmosphere. It's completely different from the hustle and bustle of the main base. If you go, check it out.



So now the final thing I had to do was to meet up with John Egan, EAA's director of Chapters. I was going to accept an award for Young Eagles Ground Support Volunteer for 2021 on behalf of Dennis Spitaleri. As I mentioned earlier, it was cancelled due to the weather. So, I was able to meet him at the Blue Barn, where this entire trip began. So, it was fitting that we had a nice, little ceremony for

Dennis at the blue barn. There are thousands of Young Eagle ground support volunteers around the world who give countless amounts of time and talent to make the Young Eagle program the success it is. So, for Dennis to be selected to receive this award is truly a huge recognition for him and our chapter. Thanks to all our volunteers. Your support does not go un-noticed!

This year's trek to Air Venture was filled with lots of memories. Met up with several old buddies, hung our directional sign, picked up the award for Dennis, witnessed an incredible nite airshow, checked out all the experimental aircraft companies, shopped, walked a lot, and ate the famous Wisconsin Brat. Mission complete!

