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WISCONSIN AVIATION TRADES ASSOCIATION

Beautiful Summer Day, & No One Flying, Spurs Pilot To Become FBO

by Dave Weiman

MANITOWOC, WIS. – Provide service to meet the needs of clients, seems to be the philosophy held by Curt Drumm of Lakeshore Aviation, Inc., at Manitowoc County Airport, Manitowoc, Wis., a new FBO north of Milwaukee along the Lake Michigan shoreline.

Lakeshore Aviation provides its corporate customers first-class line service, a nice pilot lounge and crew cars. On the other end of the service spectrum, the company wants to provide a clean and affordable fleet of aircraft for rent and instruction including

a 1976 Cessna 172 Skyhawk and a 1969 Cessna 150 – both with new paint, clean interiors and King IFR-equipped. The C-150 rents for \$59.00 wet, and the C-172 for \$79.00. The average Private Pilot Certificate costs \$4,500 in the C-150 and \$5,500 in the C-172. Veteran pilots Jim Wheeler and Leon Sigman are Lakeshore’s CFIs.

In addition to flight training through commercial and instrument, Lakeshore Aviation offers seaplane flight training, thanks to Drumm who is both a CFI and owner of a 1979 Cessna 172 Hawk XP on Wipline amphibious floats. Drumm is also the 2005 chairman for the Wisconsin Seaplane Fly-in to be held September 9-11 at Eagle River.



Curt Drumm
Photo by Dave Weiman

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Lakeshore Aviation will also be offering a 1939 J-3 Cub for rent and tailwheel instruction, and “Sport Pilot/Light Sport Aircraft” flight training.

Drumm’s enthusiasm for the oftentimes difficult FBO business was ignited one beautiful summer day when no one else was flying. “It was 78 degrees and sunny, there was a gentle breeze, and no one was flying,” said Drumm. “That’s when I knew that something was wrong, and that something had to change!”

Drumm decided then he would bid for the FBO contract when it came up for renewal, and build the flight training and aircraft rental segments of the business by providing customers with an affordable fleet to rent and use for training. So far, Drumm has been encouraged by the response. In the 4 hours I was at Lakeshore Aviation, there was a steady flow of incoming calls reserving both planes.

In obtaining the successful bid for the FBO at Manitowoc, Drumm put together a group of investors including pilots and local businessmen. Drumm is president, Jim Ruffolo is vice president, and directors include Don Gruett, Mark Ring, Dan Ariens, and Keith Hartlaub.

As president of the local EAA chapter (#383), Drumm has embraced local chapter activities and encourages EAA involvement in the annual Manitowoc County Airshow (a 501C non-profit corporation) which Drumm has chaired for several years. This year’s airshow will be held June 4-5 and will feature both civilian and military acts. A hangar dance featuring the Dorf Kapella polka orchestra will be held Saturday, August 20, and the flying and general public is cordially invited to attend both events.

In preparation for EAA AirVenture-Oshkosh, Oshkosh, Wis., Lakeshore Aviation will host the American “Yak Club’s” formation clinic, and Piper Comanches will converge at Manitowoc to organize a mass arrival to the event.

What prepares someone to become a fixed base operator?

Unlike most people who either work into the business through family involvement, or by going through the ranks from line person, flight instructor, charter pilot, and then owner, Drumm, 47, comes from a radio, television and motion picture production background. It was while Drumm was a manufacturer “rep” for Ikegami cameras in Los Angeles that he met a cameraman who was a CFI and invited Drumm to go for his first flight. After that, “I knew I was bit by the flying bug!” said Drumm.

Among the aircraft Drumm has owned include a Cessna 172, 210, and 310; Single and Twin Comanche; J-3 Cub; a Stearman; and now his Hawk XP.



Lakeshore Aviation, Inc. personnel (L/R): Rick Wrobel, line person; Erik Hilke, flight support ops; Curt Drumm, president/manager; and Jim Wheeler, CFI.

Photo by Dave Weiman

Fellow Lakeshore Aviation board member, Don Gruett has owned a number of aircraft, too. Among his current fleet of personally-owned aircraft is a T-34 Mentor, Beech Dutchess, Lake Amphibian, T-28 Trojan, Citabria, and a Micco. Gruett, who has patents on more than 30 inventions and owns a manufacturing business, admits that he hopes his

wife doesn’t find out how much he has spent on what is referred to locally as “Don’s Toy Box.”

In addition to flight training, aircraft rental, and 100LL and Jet A fuel sales (AvFuel), Lakeshore Aviation offers aircraft maintenance. Leon Rediske is the director of maintenance and IA at Lakeshore.

Before joining Lakeshore, Rediske owned and operated Rainbow Airport in Franklin, Wis., until the City of Franklin forced him to close the airport and sell the property to the municipality. Rediske also once served as president of the Wisconsin Aviation Trades Association (WATA) which Drumm recently joined, as well as the national association of fixed base operators, the National Air Transportation Association (NATA).

In time, Lakeshore plans to offer air charter service, but this is not an immediate priority. “All in good time,” said Drumm. “Right now we have our hands full with rental, flight training, and corporate customers.”

Lakeshore has welcomed the support of fellow WATA members John Lotzer of Gran-Aire at Milwaukee-Timmerman Airport and Waukesha Flying Service, and that of Jeff Baum of Wisconsin Aviation, Inc. (Madison, Watertown & Juneau, Wis.). In addition, Drumm has received assistance from Gary Dikkers of the Wisconsin DOT Bureau of Aeronautics.

“Like John and Jeff, we want to help GA grow, and share our love of aviation with those who are pilots and those interested in learning how to fly,” said Drumm. Among the activities offered local pilots and transients is a lobby for socializing and hangar talk, free coffee and donuts every Saturday morning, and fly-outs to one of many Wisconsin airport restaurants like Pat O’Malley’s Jet Room at Dane County Regional Airport in Madison.

“We are getting the Manitowoc Airport back to grass-roots aviation, yet we are still providing essential services to our corporate and transient customers,” said Drumm. “We are putting the heartbeat back into the airport and I see this as a positive thing for everyone!”

For information on Lakeshore Aviation and aviation events at the Manitowoc County Airport, call 920-682-0043 or visit their website www.lakeshoreaviation.com. □