

Experimental Aviation Association chapter one of nation's best

By Mike Cook
Las Cruces Bulletin

Located at the corner of Wingspan and Gasoline Alley at the Las Cruces Airport, the hangar belonging to the Experimental Aviation Association Chapter 555 (EAA555) of Las Cruces houses small aircraft belonging to individual EAA members, along with one airplane they are building together.

About 100 EAA chapters nationwide applied for a set of free airplane wings being donated by four different manufacturers. Based on the quality of their application, EAA555 was one of five selected to receive the wings, said EAA555 President Wes Baker. "They asked a lot of questions in the application about how many members had skills in one technical area or another," he said. "It was actually kind of like applying for college entrance, or a federal grant."

Chapter members selected wings from Sonex, an airplane-kit manufacturer based in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. The plane they are building is a Waix (pronounced "Y-X"), which has a Y-tail configuration, a variant of the more common V-tail Sonex airplane.

"We chose the Sonex wings because we were pretty sure we could build one fairly quickly," he said. "Also, we thought their Waix airplane just looked a lot cooler than the others, and we wanted something other people could get excited about."

Baker said the two-seater plane will be finished by the end of this year, and will be flown to Oshkosh in July 2017 to be a part of the world's largest airshow, AirVenture, the International EAA Fly-In.

EAA555 was formed in the late 1970s, Baker said, and was originally located in El Paso. The chapter purchased its hangar at Las Cruces Airport from NASA astronaut and U.S. Air Force pilot Frank Borman when he left Las Cruces about 15 years ago, Baker said. Borman, who housed his collection of World War II fighter planes in the hangar, charged



EAA Chapter 555 members working on the EAA's Waix airplane.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB DIVEN



Las Cruces artist and EAA Chapter 555 member Bob Diven with the full-size replica of a 1917 French Nieuport 17 fighter plane which he is building from scratch.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WES BAKER

EAA55 for only about half the value of the hangar, Baker said.

EAA555 leases the land the hangar sits on from the City of Las Cruces. Its other regular expenses are insurance on the hangar and the planes inside.

The planes include Baker's 1948 Cessna 140, for which he

paid "half the cost of my new pickup." The plane, Baker said, "will still be flying in another hundred years." Baker, who is in his sixth year as EAA555 president, is director of Information Operations for Las Cruces Public Schools. After Baker retired from the United States Air Force, he

and his wife traveled the country for a year before deciding to settle in Las Cruces. Attractions included "the fantastic people" and "the wonderful airport," which gives EAA555 members and other pilots "a lot of freedom to fly when we want."

Another plane at the Las

Cruces hangar is EAA555 member Bill Madden's 1920s bi-plane, which he still flies, Baker said. Also at the hangar is Las Cruces artist Bob Diven's full-size replica of a 1917 French Nieuport 17 fighter plane, which Diven is building from scratch.

EAA555 has about 90 active members (including New Mexico Pilots Association [NMPA] President Cathy Myers of Las Cruces), but has a mailing list about three times that size, Baker said. Its monthly pancake breakfasts routinely draw 150 or more people, including association members and other pilots, plane enthusiasts and members of local car, motorcycle and bicycle clubs.

The EAA, including Chapter 555, is "a wonderful structure for keeping aviation alive in the minds of the public," said Myers, who is student advisor at Doña Ana Community College. She said the EAA and NMPA work together on safety and education for pilots and the general public. "The EAA is a tremendous part of that," Myers said.

"Experimental" is an FAA category of airplane, Baker said. It means the plane was built by an amateur and cannot be used "in any way to make money," Baker said. Many are built by the people who own them, he said, from among more than 1,000 available airplane kits. All of them are fully inspected by the FAA before they can fly, and "the safety record is really good," Baker said.

"I am absolutely confident that I am in much more danger driving out to the airport than I am once I get in the airplane," he said.

Baker said many EAA members are also members of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association. Pilots, he said, get a "a much more rich experience being a member of the EAA or a similar organization." EAA was founded in 1953 and has more than 180,000 members nationwide.

A Ford Tri-Motor fly-in to

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PHOTO COURTESY OF WES BAKER

EAA Chapter 555 President Wes Baker and Las Cruces Public Schools Chief Academic Officer Andrea Fletcher, about to take a ride in Baker's 1948 Cessna 140.

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the Santa Teresa airport in February 2015 that was sponsored by EAA55 and the War Eagles Museum, “really put our chapter on the map,” Baker said. Attendance was more than double what it had been for any previous Tri-Motor fly-in, and that helped get EAA55 national recognition “as one of the best chapters in the country,” he said. 199 Tri-Motors were manufactured by Henry Ford between 1925 and 1933.

EAA555 also provides free airplane flights to children and adults through its Eagles and

Young Eagles programs. “We’re out here pretty much every weekend flying kids and adults,” Baker said. Some of the children they fly have never been in an airplane before and are “kind of scared,” Baker said. But, after a few minutes in

the air and even a brief turn with the controls, “It’s amazing to watch these kids. They want to become pilots, they want to become mechanics,” he said.

“You don’t have to be Superman to become a pilot.”

For more information, visit www.555.eeachapter.org and <http://www.eaa.org/en/airventure>.



Call to Artists

Branigan Cultural Center opens call for 2017 proposals

Branigan Cultural Center, located on Main Street Downtown with the Las Cruces Museum of Art and the Museum of Nature and Science, seeks proposals for exhibits with themes of cultural and historical significance to the Southwest to be presented in 2017. Branigan Cultural Center is accepting submissions from artists (solo and group,) from formal and infor-

mal scholars and from cultural heritage organizations.

To apply, email your proposal to bcc@las-cruces.org no later than 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 18. Proposals must include proposal and exemption forms which can be found at the BCC website, <http://tinyurl.com/bccall2017>.

Applications needs to include a brief (1-4 paragraphs,) should include artist(s) statement or group’s mission, 5 to 10 JPEG images of proposed work (or those of similar style and quality) and linear and/or square footage needs. Exhibits will run for a 6- to 12-week period. Incomplete or late proposals will not be accepted.

For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/bccall2017> or stop by the museum and speak to the receptionist. The Branigan Cultural Center is located at 501 N. Main St. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday. Call 541-2154.

NM Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum seeks tour guides

The New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum, 4100 Dripping Springs Road, is looking for volunteers to be tour guides during the spring 2016 season. Tour guides help the museum teach visitors about the rich cultural legacy of New Mexico by taking students through the museum. Enrich your own knowledge of New Mexico agricultural history at the same time. For more information, call Debbi Holderby at 522-4100 ext. 116.

Mesilla Valley Fine Arts Gallery accepting applications

Mesilla Valley Fine Arts Gallery is accepting applications for exhibitions and encourages artists to stop by the gallery to learn more. Mesilla Valley Fine Arts Gallery is located at 2470-A Calle de Guadalupe, across from the Fountain Theatre in Mesilla. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Sunday. For more information, call 522-2933 or visit www.mesillavalley-finearts.com.

Desert Roots Artists’ Market and Gallery seeks artists

Desert Roots Artists’ Market and Gallery, 1001 S. Solano Drive, extends a call to artists in all media to showcase works in February and March. Submissions now being considered. For more information, call Cynthia at 652-7366.

Tombaugh Gallery seeks regional artists

The Tombaugh Gallery is calling for regional artists within a 300-mile radius of Las Cruces to submit proposals for exhibitions for the 2017 calendar year. Non-traditional media or subject matter is welcome. All artwork must be for sale. Submissions should contain a letter of proposal with information about the artist, type of work to be shown and USB flash drive containing eight representative images as JPEG files. For group shows, supply a list of all members and 1 or 2 images from each member. If a show theme is being considered, please explain the theme fully. The Tombaugh Gallery has 44 linear feet for wall display and has several pedestals.

Submissions should be postmarked no later than Friday, April 1. Submissions will be reviewed, and applicants will be notified by Sunday, May 1, at which time possible show dates will be discussed. Artists/shows not selected will be notified at the same time.

Artists who prefer to send an electronic submission may contact Judy Licht at jelicht@gmail.com for instructions.

Address submissions to: Judy Licht, Committee Chairperson, c/o Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces, 2000 S. Solano Drive, Las Cruces, NM 88001.

For more information on Tombaugh Gallery, visit www.uuchurchlc.org/2011/10/tombaugh-art-gallery.

Tularosa MERC seeks member artists

The MERC, Tularosa’s newest art and art gift cooperative on historic Granado St. in Tularosa is now accepting new artist memberships. Many details to share and many benefits. For more information contact greatrepm@gmail.com.



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