

FRANK REZICH, WRIGHT BROTHERS MASTER PILOT

By
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He has given his life to aviation, both as a pilot, mechanic and leader, and now Frank Rezich not holds both the coveted Wright Brothers Master Pilot award and the Charles Taylor Master Mechanic award, signifying 50-years of experience. But in Frank's case his pilot experience began at the age of 14-years when his older brother Nick told him to



fly the OX-5 Travel Air around the pattern, but specified that he land into the wind because there was no tail wheel and no brakes. The year was 1938 and the ship was NC661H purchased by older brother Mike. This would be Frank's "unofficial solo," his official solo coming in 1944 when instructor

Willie Howell signed his student pilot certificate for flight in a Piper J-2 Cub. NC661H

was the first of many Travel Air ships owned by the Rezich family and Frank still has two of them at his San Miguel, California home.

FAA obstacles overcome by Lakeland, Florida FAA Safety Team member Fred Kaiser, the coveted plaque was received by Frank on Saturday, April 2 at a ceremony held at Flanders Field, Florida in the hangar of Bob and Sandy Lock. Frank, who has been battling a lingering illness that has left him in a weakened condition for the past many months, and his daughter Kathy arrived at the Orlando airport early Saturday morning, March 30. Welcomed to central Florida by heavy rains and tornado warnings, preparation for the party continued, however Frank really did not know any of the details except his award was to come on the day of his 88th birthday, which made it even more special.

Over 70-people attended the party on a beautiful sunny Florida winter day, however after receiving 10-inches of rain, the runway was too soggy for fly-in aircraft that would have made the event even more special. Howard DGA-15 owner Al Lund was coming with two additional Howard aircraft, Harry Stenger was to bring his 330 H P Waco F-7 and Woody Woodhull was bringing his Aeronca C-3 from Ocala. Bar Eisenhauer flew his Travel Air 4000 all the way from Gulf Shores, Alabama only to find the runway too wet to land. Frank and our group had to settle for a low pass the following morning as Bar flew back to Alabama. One aircraft did brave the wet runway, as a beautiful Great Lakes 2T-1A flown by Paul Fuller landed gently on the somewhat firm south end of the runway and taxied into position in front of the hangar.



Former FAAST member Ben Coleman who represented the FAA on this day, April 2, 2011, led the presentation. After opening remarks by Bob Lock, Frank's daughter Kathy, nephew Jim Rezich (son of Nick Rezich) and his two sons, Nick and Bug were introduced.



Ben Coleman provided information about the Master Pilot award, followed by a Frank's flying biography presented by Lock, detailing his career as both a pilot and mechanic.

Right, the large crowd that gathered to celebrate Frank's Master Pilot award. Frank has friends all over the world and most all of those who gathered either



knew Frank or knew of him. Frank is famous and always draws a crowd to hear his interesting flying and mechanic stories.



Above, Ben Coleman intently listens while Frank accepts the award and thanks his many friends who have followed his outstanding career in the aviation industry. Not only was the Wright Brothers plaque presented by Coleman but also both Frank and Kathy



received their pins to proudly wear in public denoting the award.

Left, after the award ceremony, Frank and Kathy share the moment. After taking photos of both the Wright and Taylor awards, Frank is holding a special award from H. G Frautschy from the EAA Vintage Aircraft group, designating him as a “National Aviation Treasure.”

At the conclusion of the ceremony a birthday cake was presented Frank with a double eight candle brightly lit. The crowd offered a thundering rendition of “Happy Birthday” to Frank and the traditional Lock toast was presented – “May the icing on your cake never cave in from the weight of the candles!” All were treated to a fine buffet prepared by Sandy Lock, Lucinda Schwenker and Sharon Lust. There were plenty of liquid libations for all courtesy of the Lock’s. Then it was non-stop tales told by Frank, such as welding stainless steel honeycomb together on the North American XB-70, pressure testing the cockpit of the XB-70, flying around Chicago in the early days before the Midway Airport days when it was called Chicago Municipal or flying the “Hump” in Consolidated C-87/C-109, Douglas C-54 or Curtiss C-46 aircraft during the closing days of WW2.



Above, Jim Rezich (right) with sons Nick (center) and Dan (left) traveled from Rockford, Illinois and Little Rock, Arkansas to join Frank’s celebration of over 50-years of flight. They all wear the special tee shirts denoting all the Travel Air airplanes owned by the Rezich family over the years.

Photos by Richard Schwenker and Bob Lock