

Updated Club History, submitted by Warren Mumma,  
as of December 2005, is subject to revisions and  
additions to be submitted by club members

A Composite History of  
The R/C Fliers of Venice, Inc.  
Venice, Florida

Including Anecdotal Memories

(12/2005, at this writing, a disclaimer is offered as to exact dates and incidents)

We are completing our thirtieth year of existence as a Sport Flying Model Club.. We can be very proud of the advancement and progress we have made. The primary and main thrust of our existence was to create a club of like-minded model flyers for sport flying and fun. Today we do have more competitive flying at times. To many, this has enhanced our club and it has brought us attention and some cash profit from other areas.

In an attempt to “look back” starting in the mid 1950’s, we sincerely thank a long time modeler, Parker Tunis who recorded a considerable history of the early days of model flying in the Sarasota/Venice area. Parker was a member of SRQ until his death, January 30, 1994. His written record dates to the days in the mid 50’s when a club called The Flamingos flew at Philippi Shores School and at Sarasota Junior High School. These were the days of monstrous reed and single tone radio sets.

We date back to the mid 70’s when some of these local model flyers, members of the then new SRQ group in Sarasota, were starting to fly at a new park now known as Wellfield Park, Venice. Due to the park being on a fast track toward development, the model flyers quickly realized that they must look for another place to pursue their hobby. They found it at Buchan Field, a county owned grass strip airport in Englewood, Florida. The field was 15 miles south of their previous site at Wellfield. Still, it did offer a safe place to enjoy their hobby. Most of the SRQ group returned to Sarasota and the new Bee Ridge Land Fill. An agreement with the remaining flyers was reached with Sarasota County to fly at Buchan Field. This group made the decision to leave SRQ and form a new flying club to be known as The Venice R/C Fliers, Inc. They petitioned the national organization that had been formed and incorporated in the mid 1930’s and named The Academy of Model Aeronautics, to become an officially chartered club #328 in October, 1977. It does take time for some things to happen. Our initial activity at Buchan Field had started in 1976.

For the record, I have fortunately gained the names of the first two sets of officers of our club who served as officers and also at the incorporation. They were: President Lee Shaver; Vice-President Leighton Hunter; Secretary Scott Whale and Treasurer J.B. Alexander. They served in 1976-1977. When elections were next held in 1978-1979, new officers were elected. President Bill Welle; Vice President John Watts; Secretary Paul Simpson; and Treasurer Joe Krotz. This establishes our original lineage.

Buchan Field in Englewood had been built as an auxiliary field to the Army Air Corp Training Field in Venice, Florida now known as Venice Municipal Airport. As we have already said, in the late 70's Buchan Airport was a fine, safe place to fly model airplanes. Little did they know that Buchan Field would soon be surrounded by manufactured home parks. The field was practically deserted at the time. It had a three thousand foot grass strip. Across the field from the model flying site a few "old hanger queens" were tied down. A couple of homes along the side of the field did have home side hangers instead of garages. The members got along with the local

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pilots, staying out of their way when they flew. Across the fence, our newer residential neighbors in the manufactured homes were becoming very unhappy with our planes and the noise created,. About one half of the members were active flyers and the rest, like George Schindel and others were students. Jeff Bunker, Paul Simpson, Scott Whale and Bill Welle were active instructors. Carl Bufuma served as President for 1980-1981. Scott Whale left us to become a corporate jet pilot and recently (2003) was reported to have been run over by a drunk driver and killed while he was on layover in California.

The Venice R/C Fliers, Inc. were doing quite well in early 1982 in spite of the unhappy neighbors, until one day, a "graduate student" flying a "60" size model, dove it directly down from about 200 feet, through the roof of a manufactured home. A number of the members were present and went over to the crash site. The police were already there and the members were advised to not remove anything. The members had been warned that one more "incident" and it would be over for the flyers. Remember, Buchan Field is county property and the county was our landlord....fortunately for us. We had two "Angels" in the county, Mr. Maybre Carlton, a major rancher and County Commissioner, and Robert Anderson (briefly a model flyer), another County Commissioner. Both were pilots. Maybre Carlton crashed and died in 1983 while flying his Piper Cub over his ranch while inspecting cattle. We were moved by the county from Buchan Field in 1982. Dick Truschel was elected President for 1982-1983.

The county had an active landfill at the end of Jackson Road off Venice Avenue, East. The actual truck access was along a dirt road at the western edge of the landfill. It was also our only access to the new site that we were given, an 8.2 acre piece of land on the western end of the property. The county then dedicated this legally to the Venice R/C Fliers, Inc. President Dick Truschel signed a 5 year lease in November 1982 with the stated restriction that the land was only for flying model aircraft - no model cars allowed. As they capped the landfill, a 25 acre pit for dirt cover was dug. This became a beautiful lake right along our property of 8.2 acres. Again, no model boating was to be done on the lake.

The club was moved but now we faced a land mass that had to be leveled, graded and seeded to make it a model airport. The members pitched in to get the job moving along. Dick Barrett was employed by one of the local major cement companies. Often they would not have delivered all of a load and were returning, looking for a place to "dump" the unused concrete. When a truck returned with concrete, they would call Dick who alerted other members to meet at the field to receive this "gift". Dick, along with other members, cleared, leveled, and set forms about four feet wide and open ended. They would spread and smooth the fresh delivery setting stop-form boards. Eventually, we had

a concrete paved runway 280 feet long, taxiways and a pit area. There was also enough to pave approximately a 24 X 24 foot weather shelter floor. Dick did not stop there. He also donated an old carport roof from his home as the new roof of the shelter. The shelter was enclosed at one end to house our lawnmower and associated grounds equipment as well as the frequency board. It also served as the "kitchen" for Fun Fly Days.

A new member, Herbert Schrader, came out to the field to watch us fly and then said, "I build model ships in bottles. Why should I lose my eyesight with those small pieces. This is much better." Being a Tool & Die Machinist, and a master craftsman, he started building and soon was flying all over the sky. We had a small, very dilapidated shed housing our hand push lawnmowers and equipment. When we purchased a commercial front cut mower, we moved it

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into the main shelter. The old shed was falling down so it was torn down. Jack Garrett, a member and builder, designed a new 16X16 foot building that could be assembled and also could be dismantled to move in sections. This was great but no funds to build it. Our then treasurer, Herbert Schrader (also editor of the Scramble Sheet and other various printing needs we had) then started passing the hat and, in a short period of time, had collected donations of \$1400 the cost of material for the new shed. A building "bee" was set up and in two days we had a deluxe equipment shed big enough to house all of our club's equipment. Possibly you will recognize it as it now sits back of the weather shelter near the road at Memorial Field. Yes, it was moved from the old field. Herb Schrader died in May, 1996 of a brain aneurysm...a major loss to the club. The first wind sock was the cut-off leg of a pair of blue jeans donated by Bob Hill. Bob served as an officer and was a very active instructor for the club. His wife, Carol, was a member and served a number of years as our Treasurer, keeping us up to date with membership rosters. Another of our hard working members, was Steve Sams. Steve designed and oversaw the installation of our underground sprinkler and pump system to draw water from the lake.

This is the story of the building of the model airport at the Transfer Station at Jackson Road, Venice. Our first "cook" was Ken Obershaw with his wife, Jan, helping. Others joined in working the food line. Carmine Filleti, a new member arrived. He and his wife took over the chef's job. Carmine had had a restaurant in Baltimore, Maryland before moving to Englewood. He brought a beautiful restaurant grill, propane fired to cook his excellent hamburgers (not to knock the food we are now served).

About the time of our move to the Jackson Road Transfer Station, Stu Farrar joined the club and learned to fly. He progressed very quickly from trainers to advanced planes to multi-engine to one of the early jets and finally to helicopters. He served as our president in 1984-1985. Stu was very well liked by the members and was a good president. There is a story (I cannot confirm) that he gashed his stomach with a helicopter rotor. Shortly after the accident he left the club with motorcycles becoming his main interest.

We are now in 1986-1987. A new president, William (Bill) Sanders, was elected. He did a fine job of running the club. In 1987 our lease of 5 years was up and the county presented us a new 10 year lease to sign. Our previous president ran afoul of the then manager of the Transfer Station by dumping some broken concrete incorrectly. Our

President, Bill Sanders, signed the new lease returning it to the Transfer Station manager. Strangely it was "lost" by "someone" in the county and never signed by any county official therefore never returning the signed copy to the club. An unsigned copy of the lease is in the hands of the club. Regardless, the county honored our occupancy through 1997 and beyond to 1999 when we were moved to the new Sarasota County Solid Waste Complex. Following Bill, Dick Barrett came on to serve as president for 1988-1989.

By 1990 the club was prospering. We had an active membership of 109 but we also had another problem of radio interference, a matter that no one ever expected to see. A very High Transmission tower was built along Venice Avenue East. We began to have interference with our transmitters and quite a number of models met their demise because of the apparent interference. We borrowed a Frequency Monitor from the AMA. Bill Mikesell designed and built an electronic frequency Pin Board. When you took your Frequency Pin from the board and it interfered with any other transmitter in use, the Board would Buzz. Bill was an excellent

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builder but not a flyer. He built a number of beautiful models for members. We purchased a new Decibel Meter because a new corporation, The Venice Golf and Country Club, had purchased all the land surrounding our south and west sides of the county land. They were building a deluxe subdivision and told the county commissioners that we were a major danger to their golfers and the golf course along with the noise that offended them plus the new houses they were building. They hired a law office to represent them to the county and continually filed complaints against us. Gary Bennett was the current Transfer Station manager. He was our local County Landlord who had to listen to their complaints and then would meet with us to discuss their problems, asking that we keep it down. Still, he remained a staunch supporter of our operation. An interesting note: A number of times we had official county visitors. The comments they made were, "You keep this place in better condition than some of our county parks".

Jonathan Hay came down from SRQ in the late 80's, joining our club. He was an excellent builder and pilot. He was also in the vanguard of those who owned and worked on computers, employed to service them. He built and flew a ¼ scale French version of the De Havillan Bi-plane. In the early 90's he took it to the Nationals and flew, I believe, in the Sportsman Scale. He placed third that year. Being a leader, he was elected in 1990 and 1991 to serve as president and was re-elected to a second term in 1992-1993.

In this same time period, Charles Drotar joined the club. He was a realtor from Englewood who did not build or fly model airplanes, but had very strong ideas on 'how the club should be organized'. We had operated for over 15 years with four members serving as officers and seemed to be a very efficient situation. Charles decided that we must have a Board of three Directors to oversee the club's operation. This change was approved by a vote of the membership. Charles had already been elected to the office of Secretary. The new board elected was Charles "Chuck" Duke, Charles Drotar and another inactive member that was named by the other two as a third member. He did not participate on the board. In the summer of 1992, a regular meeting of the club was held at the rain shelter of our model field to discuss our ongoing activity. The officers and Board were referring to us as the Venice R/C Fliers, Inc. One of our faithful members, Don Ertel, spoke up saying, "We are no longer incorporated"!!! This caused a big flap of discussion

with the officers ruling Don Ertel out of order and ruled him out of the club for not having advised the officers and Board of this matter. He said that he had gone to the library and the information was open to anyone to read. The Board held a meeting in October to re-file for incorporation status. This took time. We had to pay state penalty fees and attorney filing fees to re-instate the club. It had to be under a new name. Therefore, THE R/C FLIERS OF VENICE, INC.” was born.

At our December, 1993 regular meeting at the firehouse in Nokomis, Florida, a ruling on a matter was declared by Charles Drotar, acting as a Board member. Joe Krotz stood and asked if the members had any say in what was being enacted. Charles Drotar said, “No you do not. It has been decided by us”. Warren Mumma had declared his nomination to serve as secretary in the up-coming election in January. Several members asked him to change and run for president against Jon Hay who was standing for re-election. Warren was elected president serving in 1994 and 1995. At the time, the directors had ruled that elections for new Directors were to be held in February after the regular Annual Meeting. Once the January election results were announced,

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there was a considerable heated discussion. A portion of it was ruled out of order by the new president. Jon Hay and Charles Drotar resigned immediately. The election of Directors was returned to be concurrent with the Annual January election. Directors were voted on. These were very tenuous times for the club. After his presidency, Warren Mumma continued serving on the Board of Directors for another 5 1/2 years.

With all this upheaval, a club of now 140 members became a club of 78 members. A number left in disgust some moving their flying down to the Englewood back roads in unpopulated areas. A major loss was having Carmine Filletti leave us by going “south”.

The remaining members continued giving strong support as we rebuilt our membership. Charles Knoth took the job as an excellent “PR” man. He got us working with the Venice schools. We held one week programs with sixth grade students to present the AMA Darts Program. This was to purchase darts kits from the AMA. These are stick, rubber band powered models that the student constructed under member guidance. One member worked with three students and then, as they constructed the models, they had a flying contest with winners declared. Charlie did an excellent job of getting us newspaper and some TV coverage. Mall shows were held and we were awarded one of the first “Gold Leader Club” awards by the AMA nationally in 1999. In very recent times, our Past District 5 Vice President, Jim Neil (now deceased) came down, awarding our club “The Award of Excellence, AMA ‘E’ Club” by the Academy of Model Aeronautics.

In 1990 we held a “Float Fly” with invitations sent to many clubs to participate. The first “Fly” was a tremendous success with over 350 area visitors coming to watch the program. The Jackson Road model airport was closed to all but water flight planes on the lake. Our first year, our past president Bill Sanders sold about 1500 \$1 raffle tickets for a completely built, radio equipped, ready to fly, Trainer Model. Bill Mikesell constructed the model, no charge. A man from St. Petersburg, Florida was the winner. We held a second “Float Fly” in 1991 - not quite as large as the first one.

The club had become aware that our time was limited at the Jackson Road Transfer Station. About 1991 our president recommended, and we approved, adding \$10 to our current \$30 dues to be set aside toward a possible relocation. Today, that is included as our \$40 annual dues. A search was initiated all over the southern part of Sarasota county for acceptable land for us. Warren Mumma had a Cessna 172 which he and Herb Schrader flew many hours trying to identify locations. As sites were found, the club identified owners and tried to meet with them. No privately owned land was found to be available. Being on county land, we identified a possible site in the county, the Carlton Tract, a preserve of over 33,000 acres and also the Pinelands Tract, just north of the Carlton Tract also owned by the county. This was another 19,000 plus acre area.

Chet Gurwacz and Warren Mumma presented proposals to the County Board of Natural Resources for approval to relocate at one of these sites. Several times we asked to use land in one of the county tracts. With an EPA-minded Board we were getting nowhere. None of our work was successful. It is now 1998. We are already one year over our agreed lease at Jackson Road. The county took the position that we were secure until they could find a new place for us on other county land. In 1998 the county was in the process of establishing a site for the new Sarasota County Solid Waste Complex. The Bee Ridge Landfill was full to overflowing and the

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Government was declaring that the county had to close it. They designed and developed a 550 acre foot print in the Pineland Tract. As it developed they had a good sized area on the eastern border of the property that would not be needed for some years. Our club and SRQ were both making presentation proposals directly to the county commissioners in 1997 and 1998. A motion was made to move both the SRQ and the R/C Fliers of Venice to new locations, SRQ to the "Top of the Mountain", the capped Bee Ridge Landfill. We were to be relocated to the new Solid Waste Complex as occupants of 6.2 acres in the center of this beautiful 1000 X 2000 foot clear space. This was just fine except we did not have the money to make the move and build a new model airport. We had contractors evaluate our current field and give us estimates on the cost of replacement. The estimate given was approximately \$65,000, a sum that staggered the club. Not having the money to move to a new field, one of our "Angels", Commissioner Bob Anderson, stepped up making a motion to the Commissioners that a Grant of \$40,000 be made to both the R/C Fliers of Venice, Inc. and to the SRQ club in Sarasota for relocation.

During these years, Pete Turner served as president in 1996 and 1997. (Deceased) He was followed by Frank Alphonso who served as president in 1998 and 1999, the year the construction of the new field was completed. Frank was a gung-ho member while he was there but as his presidency was ending, he found other interests in the boating field, guns, and later founding a motorcycle business in Port Charlotte. Warren Mumma was the current presiding board officer and became the general contractor representing the club for construction of the new field.

When we received the Grant our fine member, Jack Garrett was commissioned by the club to design a new model airport. The Board received bids from several contractors with all but one grossly exceeding our funds. Jack Garrett oversaw the layout of the field. The contractor we selected and contracted with was Meyers and Gabbert Excavating Contractors, Inc. of Sarasota, Florida. (As a construction refuse contractor, they later

became our new neighbors) The contract was to level the field, pave a runway, taxiways, and pit area as well as installing a stone base parking lot. The contract price was \$37,500. We had a remaining balance from the county's Grant in the amount of \$2500. We contracted with Blaco Construction, Inc. Venice, to construct an aluminum roofed shelter conforming to all new state of Florida hurricane specifications. This contract was for \$7800 and because Blaco was willing to split their billing into two parts, \$2500 for the balance of the county's Grant and \$5300 for our club, we were able to use the entire amount of the Grant. Now we had to rely on the members and the club field balance to pay for the shelter. The members responded very well. Once the shelter was up, Jack Garrett designed an area to wall off, creating a storage room and a serving room. This was done by members pitching in to build it. Bob Ring was instrumental in finding a water pump, designing and installing a sprinkler & irrigation system. The field was basically complete at an invested cost of over \$65,000 and Debt Free. An amazing accomplishment for our club.

The new model airport was completed and a dedication ceremony was conducted on a beautiful Saturday morning, December 4, 1999. The club had voted to name the field "Memorial Field" honoring all our members that have died. The ceremony started promptly at 10:00 A.M. with the raising of the American flag and our National Anthem. Our guests of honor were the invited County Commissioners, our District 5 Vice President, James Neil and his wife (as guests of the club), Gary Bennett, County Solid Waste Manager and the rest of the Landfill workers,

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many that we had known at our old location. It was a very joyous occasion.

The year 2000 saw us with our new president, Allen Wilder who then served us in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 plus the additional year of 2004 before retiring due to health problems. He has done an excellent job of leading us, gently but firmly. The club has continued to grow since our new field has been built. Mike Kelly, a relatively new member, was elected to serve as President in 2005, completing Allen's term.

We have a very diversified range of activity. A recent member, Robert Shaw, joined us in 2002. He has exceptionally and generously given the club several costly additional amenities. In 2004 he paid for a new control line flying circle with a paved landing area and sod. He had built, at great cost to himself, new hurricane-proof roofs over the pit area tables, extending out from the central shelter. The club has recently purchased new plastic safety fencing and paved two 10 x 16 foot areas at the ends of the pits for ¼ scale aircraft to be prepared and fueled. The fuel would destroy the asphalt if they were not on concrete. Another new addition was the building of 20 new tables for model flight preparation. As of December 2005, our total dollar investment in "Memorial Field" is in excess of \$135,000 - an extremely First Class facility.

Our club offers sport fuel-powered flying, electric powered models including the new electric "Park Models", highstart sailplane competition, electric powered sailplane competition, and monthly SAM flying along with the availability of the control line flying. In the recent past we have been host to both the IMAA as well as the IMAC organizations. It is a well diversified club. Regular Fun-Flys are held.

This is our history as of December, 2005. It has been a wonderful 30 years and we look forward to a great future! Today we are a club of 209 members entering the year 2006.

Credits to members that contributed long lost records and information:

Jeff Bunker

Joe Krotz

Bill Sanders, Past President

Parker Tunis, SRQ History

Richard Wahab

Bill Welle, Past President.

This history was assembled and written by Warren M. Mumma, Past President and former Board Member.