

Off Tow Newsletter

Puget Sound Soaring Association, Inc.

Editor: Dave Kremers

Dec., 2006 - Jan., 2007

Seattle, WA

Upcoming Events:

Our next event is the annual **Winter Party**. This will be our chance to both do some important business and have some valuable social time together. Again, this year, Wayne and Judith Ginther have graciously offered their home for our gathering. The date will be **Saturday, January 27** and the arrival time will be between 4:00 pm and 6:00 pm. An earlier arrival will give guests a chance to enjoy Wayne's park-like back yard and to take in some new soaring videos he's acquired along with refreshments before the serious eating begins. Again, as always, it will be a potluck affair and do bring your beverage of choice. Our all important year-beginning general business meeting will follow.

Recent Events:

Besides a recent TTS session and a board meeting in early December, there has been very little going on with PSSA since our shutdown for winter maintenance (more about that later), unless you count the members who have been enjoying the great early ski season. But that's not what this newsletter is about. By now, recent events will include your Christmas holiday and New Year celebrations, and we hope your holiday season was a good one. Oh, and there was an election for officers of a new board of directors for 2007..

Election Results:

Stefan Perrin undertook the election procedure this time around and has announced this result:

Gentlemen, the results have been tabulated and you have been chosen by the membership to take the helm for 2007. The top seven members voted on are:

Dave Kremers
Charlie Long
Kenji Ominato
Curt Chenoweth
Wayne Ginther
Kim Sears
Branislav Mikulik

The process for establishing the board is:

1. The seven elected Board members meet and select their President.
2. The six other Board members determine allocation of remaining Board positions among themselves

Congratulations to you all,
Stefam Perrin

Board News:

Your present board has been struggling with a number of issues over the past year, all of which are the kinds of things which we hope can give us a chance to move PSSA forward and insure its health in the future.



Struggling Board

Some of these items you are already familiar with as they are ongoing issues that will take some more discussion to resolve. There are a few more things, however, that have been proposed by board members and over which the board has been deliberating which will be presented to you at the Winter Party and we hope you will be there to take part in that important discussion.

As a teaser, president Tim Heneghan has provided us with this look at an approach to funding that we might think about:

In the last issue of Off Tow I wrote that you would soon see a proposal for an alternative method of funding PSSA's glider operations. For your reading pleasure, that proposal follows. Please take the time to read it over and give it some consideration. This will be one of the topics discussed at the upcoming Winter Party and general membership meeting, so make note of your comments or questions and bring them with you.

Puget Sound Soaring Association Flat Rate Flight Plan

As background, let me explain that PSSA's revenues are generated from three areas of the operation. Membership fees & dues, glider income, and tow income. Each category needs to generate the income necessary to carry out that portion of PSSA's operation.

Yearly dues are set to cover the field lease and general operating expenses such as telephone, Internet, port-a-potty, mowing and so on. Glider rental rates are set to cover the cost of placing the gliders on-line, and have them ready to fly at members' convenience. Glider expenses include servicing of capital costs, insurance, annual inspection, maintenance, and maintenance reserves. Similarly, tow rates are set to cover the total cost of operating and maintaining the tow plane.

Let's focus now on glider costs. With the dues covering basic operating expenses and the cost of the tow plane covered on a per-tow basis, PSSA has traditionally covered the third category of expense, the cost of providing gliders, by charging members on hourly rate for their use. Whereas it would at first seem perfectly reasonable that the cost of having club gliders available to members be born solely by the members who actually fly them, I would like to suggest another way to look at this.

The new perspective I will propose was prompted largely by recognition of a continuing problem at PSSA, i.e. financing and maintaining a fleet of club gliders. Each year we have been having trouble covering the real costs of providing a glider fleet to members. Besides struggling with how to support the purchase and maintenance of a new single seat glider we have to cover the costs of our existing fleet. Most costs of having our existing gliders ready at the beginning of the season are due up front before operations begin and anyone climbs into them to fly. This means we start with a debt. Not until later in the season or at the very end will we know if we have covered that debt. And, this assumes that all plane rentals are paid for. We have unfortunately suffered a high rate of bad debts over recent years, which the club can ill afford.

And, now to address the question of who pays for what. My contention is that as a member of a glider club whose purpose is promoting the flying of gliders, each member can be thought of as having a certain obligation to support that purpose by sharing in the cost of providing those gliders, whether they personally fly them or not. Certainly we all have the desire to fly our gliders and, if we don't, then, that, for whatever reason, is an opportunity that has passed us by, and more power to those who have been able to make use of those gliders. But my point is, perhaps there is another way we can look at the problem of covering the cost of providing gliders to club members.

Following are several options we might have available to us if we choose to spread the glider costs more evenly. Let's start with the extreme one and work from there.

First, in its simplest form, rather than charging an hourly rate, a flat, yearly fee would be charged that would give each participating regular member an unlimited number of flights in the L-13 as well as in a club single seat glider that could now be supported by the funds provided by such a plan. Here are some proposed elements of that plan:

- Any member wishing to fly the L-13 or single seat glider would have to pay the flat rate.
- Flights would still be subject to the one-hour time limit if other members are waiting for the glider, **but there would be no limit to the number of flights a member could make.**
- Members who do a very limited amount of flying could opt to fly on an

hourly rate but the only glider available to them would be the 2-33.

- Students could be allowed to use the 2-33 at a special student rate on an unlimited basis.
- Private ship owners would have an option to purchase a limited number of flights in club ships at an hourly rate. If a private owner wanted full flight privileges in the club ships they could always opt to pay the full yearly fee and receive unlimited flights just as any regular member.

Of course, under this plan, all members would still pay full club dues and continue to pay for tows on a per-tow basis. A suggested added wrinkle could be to offer a prepaid "unlimited tows" pass. Finally, the use of a prepay system would avoid the nagging problem the club has experienced with bad debts.

The total number of members would certainly determine the rates to be charged, the more members the lower the rate. At the present membership level a flat flight fee would be \$820.00 per year for each regular and family member. Private ship owners would pay \$35.00 an hour for the L-13 and \$45.00 for the single seat glider, and they would be allowed maximum of 10 flights, or 5 hours of flight time at these rates. Members opting to fly strictly on an hourly basis would pay \$50.00 per hour for the 2-33 (yes, there would be advantages to an unlimited flying membership). New members would pay the normal \$350.00 initiation fee, yearly dues and flight fees prorated to the month in which they join. Actual rates would be set by the Board of Directors at the time the program was implemented and would change due to membership variations.

A second option suggested, a variation on the above program, would be to require every member to prepay for a set minimum number of flight hours, with an hourly rate charged for hours flown beyond the minimum. This would also ensure the wider sharing of the basic fixed costs associated with making the gliders available, but it would not include the acquisition of a single seat glider. There may be several permutations of prepay, flat rate schemes which could fit our club's needs and could be worth pursuing.

At this point let me mention a second problem I see in the past history of our club. A few members do most of the flying and a good number do very little flying. This could be a result of choice or circumstance, but it points up another big advantage to the flat rate approach. The fact that a member has paid up front for an unlimited use of a glider will be a strong inducement to make as many flights as possible. This would be a distinct safety boost due to the enhanced currency achieved. This is also an excellent method of encouraging new pilots and potential members to join PSSA. Students and new pilots generally make more flights than any other membership category. This program will look very attractive to them.

Let me recap, then, with a list of possible advantages to a form of flat rate plan:

- the cost of operating a single seat glider could be covered,
- more members flying (more fun, right?),
- higher currency among members, higher safety,
- an inducement to club members to reduce their cost of flying by looking for new members,
- no deadbeats

Similar methods of operation are in use at various clubs across the U.S. Yes, it would be new to PSSA and we may find it doesn't work for us. But, we'll never know without trying.

Not long after you read this, a new Board of Directors will be taking over the reins at PSSA. I encourage all of you to give this serious consideration and let the new board know what you think.

Regards,

Tim Heneghan
President
Puget Sound Soaring Association

Equipment Maintenance:

The work required on maintenance has been underway thanks to Curt Bryan, Joe Salz and Mark Allen. Curt has arranged to have the radio wiring in both L-13 and 2-33 checked out at Thun Field. And, both he, Joe and Mark have been attending to various minor issues on the Cub, mainly in the cockpit. At present, it looks like we will be in a much better situation at the beginning of the upcoming season relative to aircraft and their readiness. Be sure to say a word of thanks to them for their labors.

We end this newsletter with best wishes to all in this new year. We certainly hope to see you all at the Winter Party and at Bergseth Field starting in March to renew our pursuit of great times in the air on rising thermals.



On Tow at Bergseth in '06

Photo: Tim Heneghan

Note:

Newsletter contributions:

As always, your input to this newsletter is very important. Please let us know if you have new information, valuable experiences, constructive comments, even gripes which will help to make this a better club offering the safest and most cost effective soaring opportunity in the area. Send items to Dave Kremers (dkremers@earthlink.net).

