



Anatomy of a Flying Field

The Spirits of St. Louis R/C Flying Club, Inc. was formed in 1965. During the next 34 years, we had three different flying fields in the vicinity of Creve Coeur Lake, in Maryland Heights, Missouri. The St. Louis County Parks department purchased the property we had been leasing and, in early 1999, notified us that we would be losing our third field to a developer of a golf driving range. The first two had also become golf driving ranges! The St. Louis County Parks Department offered a couple of other sites in the area but, even though Spirits' Secretary Paul Geders tried valiantly, we were unable to

get Conditional Use Permits (C.U.P.) due to nearby subdivisions' apprehension about noise. We were confident we would eventually find a field, but the big question was "where?" Several people came up with ideas, all of which were pursued by the Board of Directors if the site showed any promise at all. By mid-1999, little progress was being made in finding a field, so the Spirits' Board of Directors offered a reward of lifetime free membership to the finder of a field site that we could actually get. A short time later, the reward was extended to include the

option of a substantial cash reward instead of membership, finder's choice!



This photo is symbolic of the pride the club feels for its country, state and club.



Spirits' members started the new year off right with a Fly-In on January 1, 2002. The temperatures were in the teens!

More people were looking now! Time after time, we were rejected by the owners or the property had problems that could eventually turn around and bite us. Ideally, the new field would be within 30 minutes driving time for the majority of the members.



The paved pit area during the Spirits' first annual Open House on September 29, 2001.

It had to be well away from residential areas. It had to be at least three or more miles away from other R/C flying fields and be fairly flat land with few or no trees. We had to be able to afford the rent and develop the property to meet our needs. We had to be able to access it without building roads that would be beyond our means. We didn't want a field that would be under water or inaccessible every time it rained and we had to find a landowner we could work with. We looked at a lot of farmland in northwest St. Louis County and much of St. Charles County. There were several potential sites, but the owners had farmed them for generations and couldn't accept change, didn't want strangers in the area, or wanted to sell the property for a ridiculous price, so we were rejected time after time. Some members came up with reasonable looking property with willing owners, but there were always houses a block or two away, it was in an airport landing pattern, or some other situation existed that could wipe us out when we applied for a C.U.P. or after we started flying. We were planning to invest a substantial amount of money in the new field, so it was imperative that we have all our

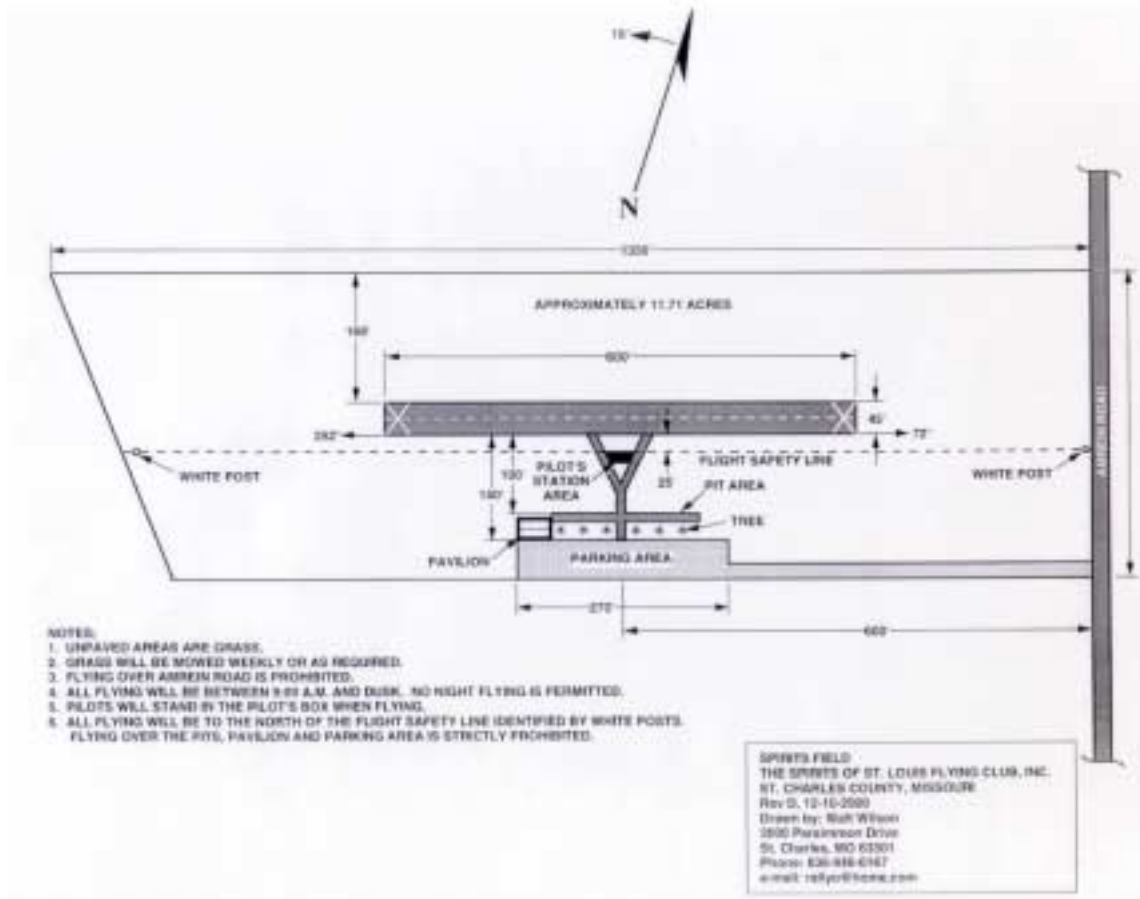
ducks in a row. I contacted The St. Charles County Parks Department and the St. Charles City Parks Department. It didn't take long to realize that we would have to deal with a private landowner to be successful anytime in the near future. I talked to owners of land that looked promising, followed leads that other people supplied and even contacted a real estate agent to look for us. I looked at and/or tracked down the owners of more than twenty pieces of property, with no luck. Several other members were looking, too.

At a family wedding reception, I learned about a gentleman who owned a lot of property throughout St. Charles County. Through a friend of a relative, I eventually got a correct name and phone number for John Ostmann. I called him, and he was interested. Initially, he showed me a field just across a levee from the Missouri River, which was not acceptable for a number of reasons. I asked if he had anything else. That's when he showed me our present site. It consists of 12.4 acres, is adjacent to a paved road, is almost perfectly level with no trees on the property and has open farmland on three sides. There's a wooded area about 200 feet beyond the end of the property to the west. We talked about a price range, which was within our means, and he said he would have to discuss it with his brother and their families. When I called him a couple of days later, he said they didn't want to lease to us because of possible liability in case of an accident. I assured him that they would be covered by AMA insurance and, after some discussion, convinced him to meet with our president and other club officers. He agreed reluctantly. President Eric Langston, Treasurer Les Richman and I met with Mr. Ostmann and his brother,

David, shortly before Thanksgiving in 1999. We looked at the property and discussed possible layouts for quite some time. The Ostmanns were becoming more interested. On the Friday after Thanksgiving, we had a number of Spirits come to the property to give a flying demonstration for the Ostmanns and their family. They used a private gravel road for a runway and did a great job of showing what we do. The Ostmanns were smiling. Spirits' Secretary, Paul Geders, pitched in and negotiated a firm price, we all shook hands, and we were in!

Since we were planning to build a runway and spend a substantial amount of money on the field, we wanted to be sure we did everything right. We agreed with the owners that we would get a C.U.P. before signing a lease.

With input from other Board members, I laid out a drawing of the facility, which was approved by the membership. When it became known that we had a site, Spirits' member Steve Cross e-mailed me, and volunteered to do what was necessary to get the C.U.P. and other approvals for the club. He said he had been a member for some time and this was something he wanted to contribute to the club since he had some expertise and contacts in this area. The Board of Directors gladly accepted his offer. I think none of us really anticipated the volume of permits, approvals, etc. that would be required. When we applied for a C.U.P., the first presentation was scheduled for March 15, 2000 and announced in the newspapers. As directed by St. Charles County Planning and Zoning requirements, Paul Geders wrote a Site Development Plan. We were notified that two residents of subdivisions, one approximately 0.7 mile and another one



This is a detailed drawing of the Spirits' field. Much thought went into the design and execution of their plan.

mile away, had written letters expressing concerns about the potential intrusive noise and fear of model airplanes crashing into their yards or houses. Bob Fiely organized a flying session and Steve Cross' son prepared a videotape of planes flying at the proposed site. Camcorders were placed along Greens Bottom road, 1/2 mile from the site and well short of the nearest subdivisions. A member spoke in a normal voice into each camcorder to establish a baseline sound level. The planes were almost inaudible from that distance. Casual conversation and passing cars were many times louder.

On the night of the first hearing, Steve Cross presented our proposal and showed the tape. Spirits' members brought two of the planes that were featured in the video to eliminate any misconceptions about the types and sizes of the planes to be flown. Commission members seemed favorably impressed. Property co-owner John Ostmann took the floor and told the Commission that he felt the field would be an asset to the community. After our presentation, two ladies (apparently the letter writers) came forward and expressed their concerns. One said that, some months before; a model airplane had crashed near her property. Steve rebutted by

assuring the Commission that none of our members had ever flown in the area before the demonstration flights, and none had crashed at that time. We later learned that someone not associated with a club had flown an R/C plane, completely illegally, near the neighborhood.

At the Commission's request, a demonstration flying session was scheduled for Planning and Zoning Commission members and the concerned citizens. The Commission members and one of the concerned ladies agreed that there was almost no audible sound at Greens Bottom Road and that issue went away. One of the Commission members even got in some stick time on a buddy box!

It was required that we have a professional survey and plat drawn of the property. Retired surveyor and Spirits' member John Hrinsin did the drawing and wrote a legal description of the property. We had to get a 404 Wetlands Determination from the Corps of Engineers to develop the property in a flood plain. This required getting an authorization from the property owners and working through the Natural Resource Conservation Service. We needed an Entrance Permit to attach our access road to Amrein Road and had to install an asphalt entrance. We had to get a Sediment and Erosion Control Plan required by the County Highway Department. The County also required that we provide details and post a \$1000.00 Re-vegetation Bond guaranteeing that we would plant grass. The Planning and Zoning staff made their recommendations to the P & Z Commissioner and Steve attended that meeting to answer some questions on April 19, 2000. The Commissioner then presented and recommended our

proposal to the St. Charles County Council on May 9. Steve Cross and John Ostmann attended the meeting to answer questions, but none were asked. The County Council finally approved the C.U.P. unanimously on May 30. It took another month to make more changes to the Site Development Plan and complete all the items required by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Finally, we signed a lease and moved our tractors and other equipment into a nearby barn, which was included in the rental agreement.

During the six-month period, after many revisions, phone calls and trips to the St. Charles County Administration Building, all the requirements prior to building anything were satisfied.

Eric Langston solicited competitive bids to lay a 600' x 50' runway with paved pits and taxiways and a contractor was selected. A Floodplain Development Permit and Building Permit were required.

The company that had been responsible for the loss of our previous field generously donated a large part of the cost of the paving and some subsequent improvements. The asphalt runway, pits and taxiways, along with a gravel parking lot and driveway, were laid in July of 2000. Since the lease had not been signed until mid-summer, the resident farmer had planted the field with soybeans. Our field is at one end of the soybean field and the work was accomplished with minimal damage to the crop. We reimbursed the farmer for the crops that were lost. We had a "Johnny on the Spot" installed.

Our opening day and the first flight off the new runway was on July 15, 2000.

We flew until early October with soybeans surrounding the runway.

When the beans were harvested, Field

Committee Chairperson Anna Nolle and Frank Nolle, along with many other members, dug and smoothed the field with tractors. Bob Rolf arranged for a contractor to bring in earthmovers, rearrange the dirt and fill some low places around the runway. A neighboring farmer harrowed the field and it was further smoothed out. Eric Langston designed a pavilion and priced building materials for construction by Spirits' members. He also requested bids from several contractors. The best deal was offered by a builder who was selected and contracted to do the job. Another Building Permit was required. In the spring of 2001, we had a landscaping firm plant grass. Since then, we have cut a swale and installed a viaduct to improve drainage, planted trees between the parking lot and pits, planted lots more grass and made many other improvements. Frank Nolle, Anna Nolle, Eric Langston, Lee Volmert, George Cooper, Bob Rolf, Pat Keebey and many other members have spent hundreds of hours fertilizing, planting, digging, mowing, filling and performing the myriad of tasks necessary to develop the field.

Throughout the 2001-flying season, the Spirits had semi-monthly Warbirds and Four-Star 40 races. We put on a presentation and flying demonstration for a Boy Scout Troop. On September 29, we had an open house to introduce our new facility to the community. Steve Cross, who was the Event Coordinator, distributed flyers to all the area hobby shops. I arranged for articles in newspapers and a bit on the "Show Me St. Louis" television show. The publicity brought hundreds of spectators, many of whom had never seen Radio

Control airplanes and had no idea of their capabilities.



Steve Cross (left), George Cooper and Steve Ramonczuk help a handicapped spectator with his very first R/C flight.

More than 50 flyers came and flew, or displayed their planes, through the course of the day. There were no landing fees or admission fees. Guest flyers and Spirits members put on an air show with helicopters and fixed wing aircraft that dazzled spectators and flyers alike. Spectators were allowed to try demonstration flights with a buddy box. One elderly handicapped gentleman was given the opportunity to fly an R/C plane for the first time. He was so thrilled that he sent the club a thank you note! Another gentleman took a demonstration flight and filled out the applications and checks to join AMA and the Spirits on the spot! The event was so successful that it's going to become an annual affair.

The Spirits' Annual New Years Day 2002 Fly-In was the largest in club history, even though the temperatures were in the teens!

John Ostmann, speaking on behalf of the family, who owns the property, said: "We feel that the Spirits are an asset to the community. Leasing the property to the club is more profitable for the owners than farming. The Spirits have done a great job in developing and taking care of the place and this has worked out very well. We're very pleased with the whole thing." The Spirits are very happy with the field and the property owners. They have turned out to be very cooperative and accommodating. All of the requirements we had for a new field have been met. Some members, who live beyond the adjacent northwest St. Louis County

area, have a longer drive than they would like but, for most, that's an acceptable sacrifice considering the quality of the facility. Driving time will be reduced for many when a new bridge over the Missouri River opens in 2003. Now the field is one of the finest in the Midwest. Many new members have joined the Spirits and we have a full schedule of activities, as well as further development of the facility, planned for the coming year. We've come a long way from the days when you went to a nearby park, school yard, or empty lot to fly your unmuffled gas models, and no one complained.