



# THE *BUZZARD WAY*

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO FLYING CLUBS

 BY RYAN WEAVER



**I**n 2010, I stepped into EAA Chapter 582's hangar doubting the validity of the information I was given by a quiet man named Hank, standing by his Sonerai at the local fly-in the week before. He said there was a club that flew a Pietenpol Air Camper for just \$10 an hour. I was looking for a way to afford flying more often than just at every flight review. Little did I know at the time that three years later I would be a sport pilot instructor flying more in a month than the entire previous decade thanks to an aviation experiment by a handful of people at an EAA chapter committed to making flight school affordable by approaching aviation as a team sport.

While many of us daydream about having our own plane on our own grass strip ready to fly around the world at a moment's notice, the reality is that the plane mostly sits and ends up costing more than \$100 an hour for 35 hours or less of flying a year, not to mention the

cost and time of paying for that land and cutting the grass. In addition to the money savings, our club is also actively adding to the pilot and instructor pool, which means more people keeping the freedom of flight alive.

The Toledo Buzzards Light Sport Aircraft Club Inc. or TBLSACI (pronounced table sackey) was formed about eight years ago when an incredible \$6,500 deal on a zero TTSN (total time since new) Pietenpol dropped into our laps, thanks to Brian Smith, our benevolent kick-starter. Since then, more than 20 Buzzards, most of them new to Chapter 582, have earned their wings. Those early days of the club sparked to life our mascot, the Buzzard—it represents taildragger pilots so firmly rooted in the fundamentals of

Front row: Bill David, Ryan Weaver, and Lyla Weaver. Back row: David Graff, Aiden Alder holding Lulu Cthulhu, Skyler Weaver, Kate David, Andre Abreu, and Kevin Loeffler





Pete the Pietenpol Air Camper.



flight that they've never taxied a nosewheel, never pushed a starter button, and, heck, they can't even spell GPS! A true Buzzard always fixes what they break, always gives more than they take, and preserves the freedom of flying for freedom's sake.

It became apparent that this club was going to be a unique combination of old school pilot skill making over the new school sport pilot regulations. It was not going to be like any existing flying club, airplane partnership, or FBO rental arrangement. Nor is it meant to compete with any of these organizations. In fact, it could serve as a feeder system for those willing and able to pursue advanced certificates. Our whole objective is to make more pilots. The Piet has logged almost 1,000 hours of Buzzard time, and we fly it only when it is warm outside, which is about four months a year in Toledo, Ohio.

Clubs need some stuff; we had a name, a Pietenpol Air Camper with dual controls, an LLC to own the plane, an LLC to operate the plane, an EAA chapter to work on the plane, members, a hangar, shop, etc., but we needed more. We had to have standardization of operation. We had to have communal habits.

Like all successful clubs, we needed a document to go to in times of trouble and harmony, alike. We needed more than a rule-book; we needed a manifesto. And we got it. The following is a summary.

*Toledo Buzzards Light Sport Aircraft Club Incorporated (TBLSACI) is an LLC that was formed June 1, 2007, to provide quality, conventional-gear LSA primary training at the lowest cost possible by sharing the cost of ownership, with the end goal of producing as many pilots as possible. Traditional flight training has become so expensive that most who engage in it are doing so for a career, not for fun.*

*TBLSACI requires membership in EAA 582 and after joining EAA 582, members may choose to join TBLSACI and pay a low cost for training and operations. TBLSACI covers hangar rent (a source of income for EAA 582) and oil. Annual condition inspections and maintenance are completed by TBLSACI members, and they perform any repairs that might become necessary. Talon Aero, our corporate benefactor, owns the airplane and has a lending agreement with TBLSACI.*

Members dictate the flying schedule giving priority to instruction, followed by

practice, and then what we call touring. The impetus for an orderly, efficient use of the aircraft is put on the students, not the instructors, and it is their responsibility to get the most out of their instruction. Good students are prepared and coordinated.

## HOW DO I START A CLUB?

BY BILL DAVID

At this point in time it is safe to say that the answer to above question is, "It all depends." At the time I started TBLSACI there were precious few resources to refer to. This situation has been improved drastically. The EAA has put out a pamphlet titled Establishing a Non-Profit Flying Club. This is the best resource I have ever read on the subject. It provides you with a step-by-step answer to the question of how to put a flying club together. There are more than 70 pages chock-full of information with examples of supporting paperwork included. I wish it would have been available to me when I started my club.

If you would like to talk about starting your club, I can perhaps offer a few words of encouragement. Feel free to contact me at [wjddavid582@gmail.com](mailto:wjddavid582@gmail.com).

*Interested in forming your own flying club but don't have enough interest? We can help you locate EAA members in your area! E-mail [chapters@eaa.org](mailto:chapters@eaa.org) for more info.*

## A YOUNG BUZZARD

BY SUSAN JOHNSON

My name is Susan Johnson. I was 16 years old when I started flying with TBSACI. I soloed the Piet at 16 and earned my private pilot certificate at 17. Currently, I am a midshipman at the United States Naval Academy pursuing a degree in aerospace engineering. While at the United States Naval Academy, I have found other midshipmen who have earned their pilot certificate, but few have had the quality and depth of experience that I had learning to fly with TBSACI. Furthermore, the community that TBSACI has established at the airport is far superior to the traditional flight instructor experience. My fellow pilot friends often have few or no connections to the airport community they learned at after they leave home.

In the future I hope to take the skills I learned flying with TBSACI and become a naval fighter pilot flying either F/A-18s or F-35s. My ultimate goal is to become an astronaut.



Matthew Curcio and an EAA 582 student member work on a conditional inspection.



This young member helped navigate by map and sun to Lee Bottom. Below: Sometimes, daughters grow up and fly away.



To keep costs low, all members are required to work a “little more than their fair share,” as the manifesto declares. When repairs become necessary, the student/pilot responsible for the damage must lead the charge on making the repairs while all TBSACI members must make themselves available to help with these repairs. We have built several propellers to date. Although the team leader is responsible for paying repair costs up to \$2,000, when the plane is returned to service, all members pay their share back to the team leader. Repairs that have no one at fault will be completed by a team leader assigned by the president of the club with TBSACI handling initial costs until the plane is returned to service, whereby the members, again, split the cost. This leads to unparalleled low maintenance costs. In other words, “Ask not what your club can do for you.”

With our manifesto in place, we pushed forward.

A typical day of TBSACI aviating goes as follows: Students communicate with each other and set the lineup to best organize the club’s resources for a day of training. The onus is on the students to prioritize the three levels of operation (instruction, practice, touring) and confirm that all four elements (weather, airplane, instructor, student) are in working order. The time just after sunrise and right before sunset, when the air is most “delicious,” is best used for students near or new to solo. Instruction for training other than solo gets the next priority, followed by students past solo who are practicing for their exam. Whatever holes exist in the schedule after instruction and practice may be filled by pilots flying to build hours toward their LSA instructor rating. All TBSACI members are expected to pursue an LSA instructor ticket, which requires only 150 hours to qualify for. Of course we also attend several fly-ins as a group (we’ve attended AirVenture together twice), often taking shifts flying there and back. It can be good cross-country training, and it promotes the club—at least that’s how we justify having so much fun.

When it is time to go flying we use a standardized plan. From preflight to securing the plane post-flight, we use the Buzzard Way. Standardization enhances safety and whittles down the numerous tasks of aviating into something manageable for students, thereby making it easier for them to become

pilots and, later, competent instructors.

Standardization is not the only deterrent to accidents and incidents. There exists a palpable peer pressure, a voice in the head, that asks, “Are you about to bend this airplane? Are you going to risk everyone else’s progress toward their rating so that you can?” It’s one thing to break a rental or damage your own aircraft, but when you decide that you can probably handle that 15 mph gusting crosswind or probably hand-prop the plane without securing it properly, you are holding a knife to every Buzzards’ wing root.

Accidents and incidents do happen, but when they do you are not on your own. The whole team assembles to get our bird back to airworthy condition. We had an instructor swallow a valve that ricocheted itself throughout the whole engine (on his instructor checkride, no less!) at another airport. A shot engine at a foreign airport is one of the worst financial disasters of ownership that could happen. After only \$500 from each member, or less than a few hours’ dual in a Cessna 172, and some work, we were back to giving lessons by the next weekend. Another time, one of our members lost directional control on roll-out (ah, tail-draggers) and destroyed a PAPI light. Again, about a week later we were flying with a brand new horizontal stabilizer built by members, and each TBSACI member was only about \$7 lighter. Try that with a 172! E-AB aircraft offer significant cost advantages over standard airplanes when it comes to repairs and maintenance. Each repair is an opportunity to learn more about aircraft construction, maintenance, insurance, and ownership, though understandably we do our best to avoid too much time in that classroom. This is the power of the Buzzards united!

The biggest obstacle we have encountered has not been what we expected. It’s not the money, the airplane, or even insurance that has been the biggest problem. It is us. Although we have lots of practical experience building and flying airplanes, we have very little experience approaching aviation as a team sport. As nice as the fantasy of rugged individualists respectfully sharing airspace is, the reality is that many of us need to share a lot more and others keep dreaming about flying instead of actually doing it. This means accepting things that

## TBLSACI BY THE NUMBERS

Year formed: 2007 as a not-for-profit LLC

Total number of members through the years: 20

Instructors: 3

Hangar rent paid to EAA 582: \$150 per month.

Extra money is spent on building another group project, the Flaire.

Cost to join: \$250 per year

Hourly share of cost: \$10 per hour dry.

You pay for autogas.

Instructor cost: \$20 per hour

All of this money goes to the club to share in the direct and indirect cost of ownership.

In spite of the lousy windy weather of northwest Ohio, the Piet still averages a couple of hundred hours per year. Members are encouraged to purchase non-owner insurance.

needs to change. The skills needed to manage them are just emerging and should be fostered. It's time for us to explore the benefit of AB-LSA in flying clubs, and with the help of your chapter, you can do this. It enriches your chapter, and it opens a whole new path to very low-cost flight instruction. Check out EAA's flying club resource center at [www.EAA.org/sportaviation](http://www.EAA.org/sportaviation) under This Month's Extras. It is an outstanding resource.

It's time for us to consider putting on the goggles, picking up the torch, and making a few new pilots. Let's get to work!

*This article is dedicated to the memory of TBLSACI's first president, Dave Shessler. EAA*

**Ryan Weaver**, EAA 1052863, is private pilot and sport pilot instructor in Toledo, Ohio. He has been flying for 17 years.

may be difficult at first. The plane I fly is not my airplane; I cannot paint it what color I want. Besides, the local airport can offer a greater sense of community than a private strip, and that is very important when it comes to our club.

All moneys generated go back into the club. Students pay the hourly use and instruction fee, and our instructors have to pay the annual fee just like everybody else to instruct would-be sport pilots. They also pay their share for repairs and the cost of keeping themselves current. As a pilot seeking to become a sport pilot instructor, I had to take responsibility. I was not going to be coddled by an instructor, nor would he take responsibility for my lack of initiative and preparation. When I was a bad student, I wasted both of our time, and he was correct to let me know that. My training financed the club, and if I quit, I was letting the whole club down. In short, work replaces profit.

The benefits of the club, however, are great. I am a better pilot—period. I have learned how to more safely operate aircraft, how to maintain and wash them, and have become immersed in a culture where hangar talk goes much further than tall tales. We have in-depth discussions to full-out ground schools on Newton versus Bernoulli versus Coanda, mean aerodynamic chord, and in-flight emergencies. Also, as much as I like the rugged individualist persona, I have met some great people. We regularly flip each other off—it's a hand-propping thing as the Piet has no electrical system. We have our own banner, secret hand signals, and even a theme song. We camp at AirVenture together; it's a fun club. The greatest benefit is the feeling I get when I realize what this new type of club is doing. I won't break any speed, distance, or altitude records, but I do get to be an aviation pioneer, of sorts. Through TBLSACI, I am making more EAA chapter volunteer pilots. That means more people to protect the privilege of flight.

One thing you will find out if you organize a flying club like we have is that you will attract a new kind of member. Our experience is that TBLSACI brings in a steady stream of new people who become active in the chapter. They tend to be younger, too, which is a good thing for any organization. The reason, I think, is because there is something in it for them in addition to the social functions. TBLSACI is very

hands on. They spend more time interacting with other members on a spontaneous level. They are out at the hangar working on a rating or learning how to fly. In TBLSACI, a member is required to share all of the work involved with owning and operating an airplane including scheduling, paperwork, and routine maintenance. Repairs from a mishap require people to work together to return the airplane to service. Work is required in the flying club; it says so in the manifesto. In short, these members seem to participate close up rather than at a distance because there is something in it for them.

Finally, I would like to offer these thoughts. Flying clubs will become a bigger part of the landscape, no question about that. This is a little more of a challenge than a pancake breakfast, though; it takes special skills and effort. This is easy to overcome with a little teamwork. Our club seems to attract a person to an EAA chapter that might not otherwise have become involved, and that is a good thing. The financial benefit of attracting these members to EAA 582 should be mentioned as well as the cash generated for it through hangar rent and new member dues. Those in our EAA chapter who do not choose to get involved are not burdened by the work or cost of TBLSACI.

Amateur-built experimental aircraft are perfect for the mission. EAA chapters typically have some degree of expertise when it comes to building and instructing. We need to start putting that to work for the benefit of sport aviation. Group projects at this time are a foreign language to most EAAers, and that

*Billy the Buzzard Pietenoff*

