

The Manager's Approach



Vol. 6 Issue 6/7

Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

June/July, 2007

Father's Day Fly-In

This year's Father's Day Fly-In was a big success and I have received numerous compliments on how smooth everything went. This is actually a result of lots of good planning and the hard work of the excellent volunteers.

Most people will never appreciate the countless hours put in by the Fly-In Committee members. These people certainly deserve special recognition so I want to personally thank, Paul Girard, Lorraine Jasmer, Joe Day, Barry Rudolph, Frank Podesta, Bruce & Jan Watson, Del Chase, Ed Sunday, Bob Hornauer and last but not least Alan Wallace for their dedication to making the Fly-In a great success.

In addition to the Fly-In Committee, there were over sixty volunteers that worked to make the Fly-In safe and fun for everyone. Believe it or not we even had volunteers that came from New York and Florida just to help us out. Thank you again to everyone that volunteered their time this year.

Historic TBM Displayed

Danny Summers flew his beautifully restored Grumman TBM Avenger all the way down from Idaho to graciously display it at our Father's Day Fly-In. Research has indicated that this specific aircraft was actually based at Columbia Airport for a number of years and displayed the tanker number 21 on its tail. Now the TBM has been restored to its original WWII fighting configuration and is a magnificent example of the Grumman Torpedo Bomber. What a thrill to have a piece of Tuolumne County history on display at the Fly-In.



Taxiway Charlie Extension Soon to be a Reality

One of the major stumbling blocks to the construction of new hangars at Columbia Airport will soon be removed. Taxiway Charlie which is located on the south side of the grass runway will be extended to the west approximately 1,500 feet this fall. The FAA has issued a grant offer for this project and the request for construction bids has been published. Bids are due on July 25th with plans for starting construction this fall and a construction period of sixty days.

Extending Taxiway Charlie will provide all weather access to a part of the airport which has been identified for hangar development since the Master Plan was adopted in 1997. The taxiway will provide a paved surface for aircraft landing on Runway 29 to back taxi which will reduce the number of aircraft taxiing on the grass runway thus making the runway more available to landing aircraft.

Included in the taxiway construction is the relocation of the eight inch TUD waterline that currently lies under the planned foundations of the new hangars. Buildings cannot be constructed over water mains, thus the water line needs to be relocated to

an accessible alignment which will be adjacent to the new taxiway.

If the project goes as planned, we hope to be issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the construction of new hangars early next year. The new hangars are expected to be built by private enterprise with Columbia Airport entering into a long term ground lease with the hangar proponents.

Completing the Taxiway Charlie extension will be a big step forward towards several improvements planned at Columbia Airport.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Taxiing Near Crowds of People

One of the items discussed in depth at the Father's Day Fly-In Follow-Up meeting held the week after the event was the need to keep turning propellers away from the pedestrian areas. It seems every year there is some incident that elevates this concern for safety. We try to eliminate any potential that a spinning prop can come close to a pedestrian, but there always seems to be an unanticipated event that gets our attention.

During this year's Fly-In I was notified via the radio that there was a "safety issue" between the hangars that required my immediate attention. So I quickly went to check out the situation and encountered an aircraft with its engine running that was taxiing toward a Tuolumne County Fire Department water tender which was parked on one side of the taxiway and a fire engine parked on the other side of the taxiway. The distance between the two hangar rows is only 60' and with the two pieces of fire equipment parked in the taxiway, the open space available to the pilot had to be far less than 40 feet. As I recall the wingspan on this particular aircraft is around 36' which doesn't provide much clearance, if any.

Now this by itself looked a little hazardous, but in addition to having to get past the two fire trucks, the pilot still needed to taxi through the busy pedestrian area between the hangars and the warbird ramp. If negotiating through the pedestrian area was

successfully completed, the only obstacles remaining between the aircraft and the runway were a row of delineators connected together with two strands of rope, and three P-51s, three T-28s, a couple of T-6s and a few other warbird aircraft!

Now there are a few more pieces to this puzzling event. The pilot was taxiing out to participate in the Fly-In Flour Bombing and Spot Landing Contest. He also had three passengers onboard his airplane. Clearly he was a little late for the established take-off time and the obstacles in his path must have been blocking normal brain functions too.

After I got the pilot to shutdown the engine, I had one of the fire trucks pull forward eliminating half the bottle neck. We then pushed the aircraft out onto the warbird ramp way away from the other aircraft and where the prop wash would not blast other aircraft or pedestrians. I specifically told the pilot that when he returned from the contest that he must park on the west side of the airport until after the Fly-In was over, after which he could move his plane back into his hangar. So, this potentially hazardous situation turned out good in the end.

At every fly-in and airshow I have attended a dead prop line is always established, or there are flaggers and wing walkers to keep the taxiing planes away from pedestrians. Not all people at a fly-in have good hearing, good peripheral sight and are nimble on their feet. Children don't recognize the danger of a spinning propeller because it is something they can't see. A four place airplane is easily moved on level ground with four people and a tow bar, but a 36 foot wing span will never fit through a 35 foot opening. Taxiing an aircraft through a crowd of people is never safe.

The Manager's Approach is a monthly publication from the Tuolumne County Airports Director.

Jim Thomas, Airports Director
10723 Airport Road, Columbia, CA 95310
209-533-5685
jthomas@co.tuolumne.ca.us