

Plane & Pilot MIDWEST LSA EXPO

by Chris Collins



Mt. Vernon Outland Airport is excited to welcome the aviation industry to southern Illinois for the Plane & Pilot Midwest LSA Expo. The annual event focuses on connecting shoppers with aircraft exhibitors at one easily accessible and demonstration ride friendly flightline.

The Mt. Vernon Airport Authority has always been interested in growing general aviation. From a simple meeting in Mt. Vernon, Midwest LSA Expo was conceived in the fall of 2007. Pete Krotje and Eric Evans convinced Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce Board Members Curt Mowrer and the late Benny Friar that “there needs to be another LSA focused show like the U.S. Sport Aviation Expo in Sebring”. A coalition consisting of the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce, the Jefferson County Development Corporation, the City of Mt. Vernon, and the Mt. Vernon Airport Authority worked with the U.S. Sport Aviation Expo organizers and the first Midwest LSA Expo was held in October,

2009. The partnerships that launched the event are still active today.

The airport’s expansive infrastructure, a “can do” attitude, and southern hospitality have earned it many additional aviation events like the KR National Gathering, Ercoupe Owners Club of America National Gathering, and the PRA Chapter #35 Fly-In. Local events like the Salute to Freedom, EAA Fly-In and Veterans Reunion, and Balloons over Mt. Vernon bring thousands of southern Illinoisans to the airport annually. In 2013, Mt. Vernon Outland Airport was selected as the official starting point for the EAA Airventure Cup Race. The race alternates between Mitchell, South Dakota in even number years and eastern locations in the odd years. Mt. Vernon Outland Airport was selected to host the 2015 starting line and local officials plan to work hard to keep the race in Illinois in future odd number years.

From the initial Plane & Pilot Midwest LSA Expo in 2009 to today, the event has

earned a reputation for hospitality. The expo offers free admission, free parking, free camping, and even free local ground transportation. Orange shirted volunteers provide shuttles to “hotel row” located just 3 miles from the airport. Water donated by local sponsors is distributed on the flightline throughout the day to all that desire a cool drink. Exhibitors and attendees are treated to a free BBQ, beverage, and music night at fixed base operator SRT Aviation – another way of putting the shopper and seller together in a socially relaxing environment.

Aircraft sell at the Plane & Pilot Midwest LSA Expo. Aircraft purchases have been logged by attendees from Alaska and Canadian Provinces. An average of eight to ten aircraft sell each year at the expo. Why? How? Mt. Vernon Outland Airport lies just 1.5 hours by ground from Lambert St. Louis International Airport providing easy travel for commercially flying attendees. The host location is geographically suited

for easy ground transportation from major population centers like Chicago, Louisville, Indianapolis, Memphis, Nashville, Kansas City, Atlanta, Detroit, and even Dallas. With the event occurring just one month after EAA Airventure, Plane & Pilot Midwest LSA exhibitors have learned to direct their sales leads to Mt. Vernon. With little to no opportunity for demo rides at Oshkosh, potential leads flock to Mt. Vernon to experience what is difficult to do at Airventure.

The potential aircraft purchaser can conduct an intimate conversation with the exhibitor of choice, fly the chosen model, and determine if the deal is the correct deal without the distraction of someone interfering to ask “is this a Cessna”? Effective comparison shopping and comparison flying simply can’t be done at the larger shows.

The Plane & Pilot Midwest LSA Expo offers some unique partnerships. Forums and Seminars are organized and presented by the Illinois Department of Transportation, Division





of Aeronautics. Topics on aviation safety allow the expo forums to be eligible for FAA Wings credit. Other industry related topics keep attendees "in the know" on such items like powerplants, iPad navigation, and gyroplane operations. Popular Rotorcraft Association Chapter #35 conducts its September Meeting at the expo and entices regional gyroplane owners to attend in support of gyroplane exhibitors. Members of Women With Wings, the St. Louis based chapter of Women in Aviation International, conduct their annual airplane wash on Saturday at the expo. The wash draws many aircraft from the Midwest and raises scholarship funds for aspiring female aviators from the St. Louis metro east area. The expo also serves as the meeting location for the regional Bowers Fly Baby group.

Event organizers will continue to offer a safe, affordable, and convenient experience for everyone at the Plane & Pilot Midwest LSA Expo. The future will most likely find the event catering to all sport aviation such as experimentally built models. Previously mentioned amenities and attitudes can potentially lead to a great aviation event similar to those held in aviation's glory days. Mt. Vernon, Illinois recently adopted the slogan "The Festival Arts City". City government, civic leaders, airport personnel, and residents are working together to host events, conventions, and other opportunities in southern Illinois. The heavily supported Plane & Pilot Midwest LSA Expo is high on the list of offerings in The Festival Arts City!

