

BEHIND THE HANGAR DOORS

Russia, Spain, Berlin, Japan, and Indonesia are only a handful of the places this KPWT pilot has not only flown in, but lived in throughout his time with one of the worlds most infamous companies: Boeing. A man who got his pilots license before his drivers; a man who, at only 10 years old, knocked on the door of a stranger to ask about building aircraft. This is the story of a man who has lived an extraordinary life and continues working towards the advancement of aviation.

MEET MIKE FRIEND

Mike in Canada, attending a build school to overhaul the Lycoming engine for his RV-8



It was Chicago, some decades ago, when Mike saw an article about a man who built his own airplane. Caught with fascination, he put his detective hat on and found the address of this man, after which he promptly went to knock on his door. The man introduced him to their local chapter of EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association), and as they say, the rest is history.

At an even younger age, he and his family lived in California in a house overlooking the end of the LAX runway. This, coupled with the fact that his father was a commercial pilot for American Airlines, made Mike uniquely invested in aviation. He spent his time dreaming about designing airplanes and learning the gift of flight for himself. Mike attended the University of Illinois for a degree in aeronautical engineering and landed his first job at Boeing with ease. Between his degree and experience working at airports already, specifically in rebuilding a plane, Mike felt a sense of expectancy with the interview - compounded by the fact he was offered his position on the spot.

His career with Boeing led him around the globe; positions that he actively pursued. Speaking German helped him in some of these positions, and it is perhaps not a surprise that Berlin was his favorite home-away-from-home. Within these various countries Mike was tasked with opening additional tech research centers for Boeing, and was even part of the team that helped create the 787.

Of the places he experienced, he felt that Boeing's operations in Russia were the most impressive. He started the research center there with just two people, and at its height, the center employed thousands. That center has now closed, though, an ode to changing times.

In all, Mike worked for Boeing for 36 years, "taking every opportunity he could to further himself and aviation". During this time he met his beautiful wife, Laura, who by fate was a fellow American stationed in Moscow at the same time as Mike via her law firm. Laura worked as a professional translator, speaking six languages, and together they continued to travel. They married in Vienna, Austria, but chose to make the Pacific Northwest their home.

HISTORY REPEATS: BREMERTON AVIATION CENTER FOR EDUCATION

Upon his retirement, Mike knew he had no plans of leaving the world of aviation to continue without his impact. He wished to pass on the wonder that was given to him as a child, so together with Joel Mapes, they created what is now known as BACE.

BACE serves to fill the gap between existing organizations, like Young Eagles, and a child's excitement for aviation. While Young Eagles gives an amazing introduction for youth, BACE follows up with the long-term experience: building an aircraft.

A non-profit, the aircraft that BACE builds is actually owned by an LLC. This allows for the group to retain certain rights while having the legality of the plane elsewhere. Housed at Bremerton National Airport, the electric aircraft will require charging stations... making KPWT one of the first airports in Washington to have such an amenity, ignited by BACE itself. Mike plans to purchase a gas-powered plane to initially teach the kids how to fly, though, as the run-time will be better than the electric to learn on.

Like with most small organizations, there is always the concern of longevity. Mike reflects on how special it is to "see kids actually teaching their parents" how to build an aircraft, but notes that the group has to be able to grow. We encourage you to lend a hand where able - whether you yourself have knowledge of tools and mechanics or your child would like to experience the creation of flight. For Mike, BACE is a part of "what gives him a reason to get out of bed and see new things; to help others." He also points to how unique the program is and stresses the importance of showing others what is possible.



Mike using a rivet gun, repairing a glider to raise money for the BACE.

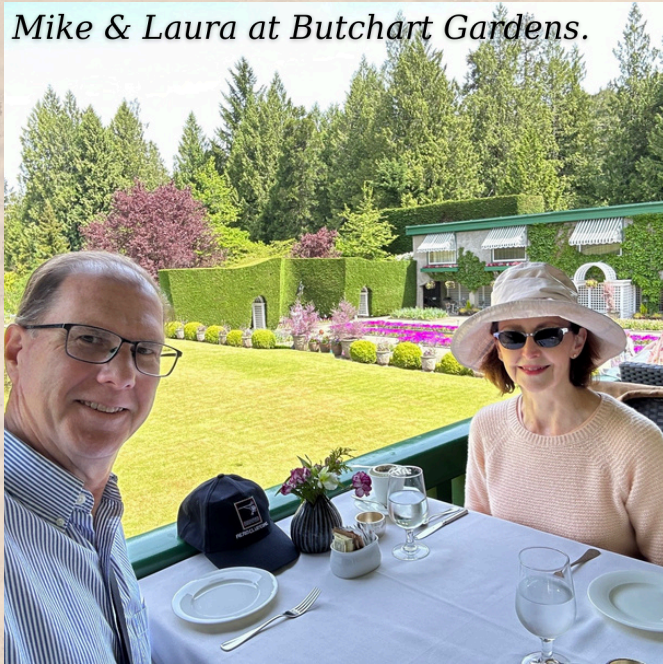
EXPLORING THE FUTURE

Retired after 36 years with the same company, approaching a decade with his non-profit...but what's next? Mike feels strongly that you can't believe everything you read on the internet regarding aviation, whether it be the claims against his former employer or the "fanciful" ideations of vertical take-off systems. He compares the latter to helicopters, saying that the hype of anything, good or bad, affects everything.

To help combat these matters, Mike looks on his experience as a plane-kit salesman. Back in

the day, he would build one-seat planes to demonstrate the opportunity everyone had to have their own aircraft affordably. It was on one of these sales trips, flying from Seattle to OshKosh, that he realized the time may not have been right for the market, but knew there would be

Mike & Laura at Butchart Gardens.



something more. He now focuses on the true needs of people, writing for aviation magazines and speaking at events on new technologies, debunking false information. Mike strives to use facts and data to evaluate matters, and still believes in taking advantage of the experience around you. In his words, it's important to remember that "you're not bigger than anyone."

Mike believes that you "don't quit flying," and surely the greater community is grateful for that sentiment. He has been a beacon for the aviation industry, both at large and in our smaller KPWT community, and without him, many children may never have had the opportunity to explore the world of aviation. He

appreciates the community side of flight more than the professional and is looking forward to continuing his tri-weekly "fun flights" with Laura, most of all to Friday Harbor, the San Juans, and Orca Island. In the meantime, we hope that you're inspired to impact the younger generation's imaginations in your own unique way.



Published July 26, 2024

WANT TO BE FEATURED?

Erica Filler
Marketing & Communications

Contact me for all things Port of Bremerton! If you would like to be featured in a future edition, I would love to hear from you.

(360) 813-0813

ericaf@portofbremerton.org

