

Local man's skills bring pilots from far away for special training

Vernonia Municipal Airport Manager Mike Seager is featured in an article in the February 2000 issue of *Sport Aviation*, the magazine of the Experimental Aviation Association.

"Journey to Vernonia" was written by Gerald McKibben, a Mississippi pilot, who described the "...2,030 hours, more than 26 months, and enough money to buy about 37 pickups..." he spent building a Van's RV-6A, an experimental airplane.

After all that, he couldn't get hull insurance until he spent two hours in training to learn the difference in handling the RV compared to the Cessna 172s and Piper Cherokees he was accustomed to flying. To protect his investment, he needed to take a trip to Vernonia, "...a town that I'd never heard of..." because Vernonia is where Mike Seager lives.

Seager is one of only two people who provides check-outs, or "transition training" in Van's RV demonstrators. He has given 1800 hours of RV instruction and has test flown 46 newly built RVs, including his own. He is also building a second RV.

Seager flies the trainees from Vernonia, in his own RV-6, to Richard VanGrunsven's grass landing strip in North Plains. Once there, they use an 11-year-old RV workhorse that was actually the factory prototype.

McKibben is enthusiastic about Seager's training, but also describes his view of Vernonia and the "NorthWET."

"Vernonia is a small town that has a frontier look, and I thought I was on the set of the TV series of a few years back called *Northern Exposure*. All that was missing was the rather decrepit looking cow moose lumbering down the street. Most buildings are built of the Douglas fir, which is abundant in the area, and I watched trucks go down Main Street hauling trailers full of Douglas fir logs."

McKibben discovered that "it rains a lot" in this area and, at 8:00 a.m., when he was scheduled to fly, it was foggy and drizzly. It was still too foggy to fly at 10:00 a.m., but Seager told him the flying prospects looked good for 1:00 p.m.

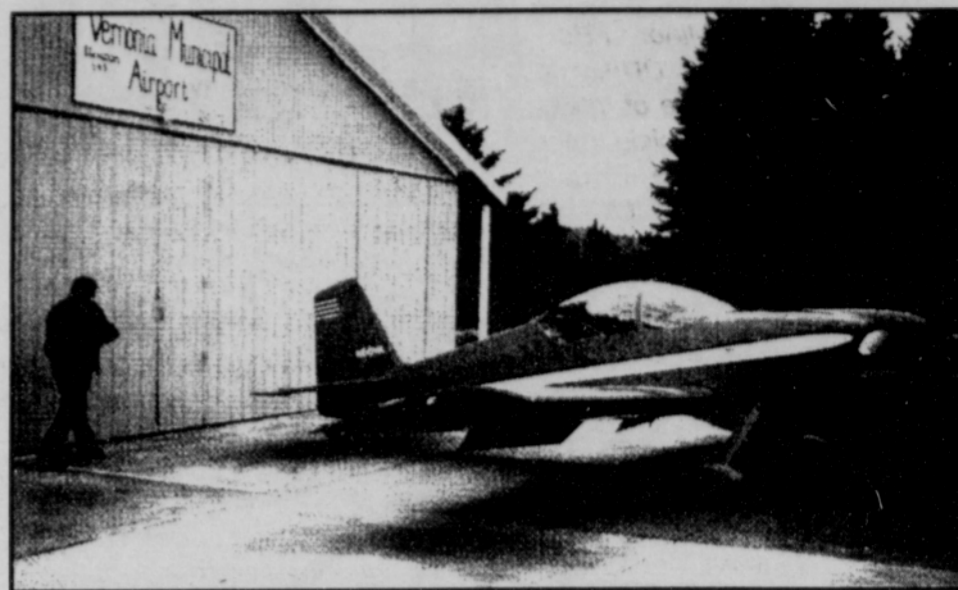
The fog lifted as Seager said and McKibben followed him to the airport, which the Missis-

sippian said "was on the only flat real estate I saw in the whole area." When they took off, McKibben was concerned about flying "right toward a towering mountain." Seager explained they were just coastal hills, but the visitor said "...in Mississippi we would still call that hill a mountain."

At the end of the successful training program, they returned to Vernonia and McKibben left the next day for the coast, going through what he described as "some of the prettiest country" he'd ever seen.

Before leaving, however, he asked the clerk at the Vernonia Inn if he (McKibben) might have traveled the farthest to get transition training. The answer was disappointing; the prior week there had been a guest from Holland for the same reason and, before that, a pilot from England. Then a Kansan registered before McKibben left.

Though McKibben didn't know it, there have also been pilots from many other countries. They all came to Vernonia for the same reason: This is where Mike Seager lives.



Mike Seager walks past a hangar at Vernonia Airport. In the foreground is his experimental RV-6.

Display of art by Pacific seniors

Eight Pacific University seniors have artwork on display in the University Cawein Gallery through May 19 during the Senior Art Show. The final exhibit of the academic year includes pieces done in several mediums ranging from photography to stained glass to watercolor to oil pastel. An opening reception will be held on Wednesday, April 19 at noon in the Gallery and is open to the public at no charge.

Senior student artists in the show are: Angela Adams,

Michael Chong, Kinsey Eriksen, Masako Fujimoto, Arie Higgins, Nada Lingel, Jean Perez, and Steven Phanou-vong.

Gallery hours are Monday through Friday from 8 am to 5 pm and Saturdays from 10 am to 5 pm or by appointment. Admission is free. For more information call 503-359-2216.

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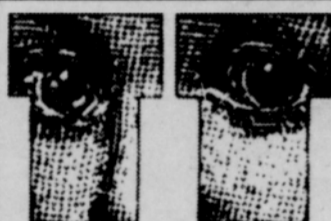
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