



# The Flyer

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May 2023

## The EARL-y Edition

On the evening of May 28, 2023, a tragic in-flight accident occurred that claimed the life of long time Chapter member Earl Luce and his passenger, Morris Wortman. Our hearts go out to Earl's wife Laura, his daughter Shannon, and the rest of the Luce family, and also to the Wortman family.

Earl's passing, besides being a deeply personal loss to his family and those of us who have been friends for many years, is a loss to not only Chapter 44, but to EAA National and homebuilding in general. Earl was known nationwide for his building skills, specifically in a series of aircraft welding videos from EAA. He was also known for building many Steve Wittman designed aircraft, and in particular, for reverse engineering the Wittman Buttercup. He started Luce Air LLC, to help others build Buttercups.

I met and talked with Earl several times, but never to any depth that I would have liked. He seemed a font of technical wisdom. I have decided that I would dedicate this month's newsletter to Earl. To that end, I have solicited stories, memories, anecdotes and pictures from friends and Chapter members to show the impact he had on people.

Hug your loved ones.

Editor.



Earl with a gas welding torch, a tool that he was particularly adept with.

Over the years, in EAA publications and elsewhere, I read about Earl's accomplishments with Steve Wittman's Buttercup. In my mind he became an aeronautical celebrity. Then I finally met him in person at a Chapter 44 meeting. I was struck by his warm, friendly, down-to-earth demeanor. I mentioned the partial project I bought into and he had some sage advice. He made me feel like we were already friends. I can't help but think that his passing leaves many empty vacancies that won't fill easily. Ron Fabretti

**Mission:** EAA Chapter 44 is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization of aircraft builders and aviation enthusiasts in the Western New York region dedicated to promoting aviation and encouraging participation in aviation-related activities. These include designing, building and restoring aircraft, education, advocacy, and youth outreach programs. We promote flying with high standards of safety in an environment that supports freedom, family, and personal fulfillment.

If you knew Earl Luce, you know he was a man of many talents. He was known as a prolific airplane builder with plenty of skills including “rag and tube” construction, electronics, fabric covering, sheet metal work, fiberglass forming and more, but he was probably best known for his expert welding skills. In fact, some even suggested that Earl could “weld closed the crack of dawn.”

What most people don’t know is I was the one that first put a welding torch in Earl’s hand. If it weren’t for me, he may never have become the expert welder he was!

It was back in the late seventies or early eighties, long before EAA 44 had our own home and so we met at different members’ homes along with libraries and other public places. This particular meeting was held at the home of Everett “Squeek” Hepler, a founding member of our chapter and an expert welder. Squeek had done a demonstration of how to weld using a gas welding torch. None of us in the shop had ever welded before. One by one, the torch was passed to the members to try their hand at joining two pieces of steel tubing together. Some managed to attach the two pieces, some had less luck. I managed to destroy several pieces of tubing. Finally, Squeek said, “Norm, you’ve done enough damage for one day. Give the torch to Earl!”

And that, my friends, is how I was the person to first put the torch in Earl’s hand and start him on his way to becoming an expert welder.

Norm Isler



This is my favorite picture, even before he passed.

We 3 showed up at BART with the same shirt....no plans to. Declared it our new “uniform”. Gail Isaac  
Left to right: Earl Luce, Gail Isaac, and Sharon Reithel

Earl was a great guy and addition to the BART team. He has been incredibly helpful with both of my sons within the program. Corey joined the group when he was 8 (now 11), and Brodie joined at 12 (now 13). Earl, Bob, and Gail really took him under their wings. Earl was always constantly teaching... even the adults. He always seemed to do it with such ease and grace. Very impressive and definitely a mindset to strive for as folks grow within aviation. I believe Earl has a special place in all of our hearts - he will be missed. For him, we won't give up on BART. Do it for Earl!

Frank Venturo

## Philip Hazen

I've lost one of my best friends. Earl and I both joined an aviation group in the late 70's and quickly became friends. I was single at the time and had recently moved back to Rochester. As Earl became more involved in repairing or building airplanes at his Brockport store, I started keeping him company after work a few nights each week until the wee hours after which we'd often go out for a midnight snack. Earl and his wife Laura often invited me to join their family for meals, family gatherings, and Shannon's dance and music recitals. I'll always cherish that period of my life and the wonderful memories Earl and his family gave me.



We have known Earl since we started flying and when we first met, it was like we knew him forever. Always a smile, a hug for me and great stories of his flying, hunting and fishing. Earl and Paul Guglielmi went hunting in Newfoundland and came home with several hundred pounds of Moose. He shared a delicious meal with a group of friends. He could cook anything!

When he was asked to mentor us for the rebuild of the Baby Ace, he hesitated but came every Wednesday night to teach us along with Vet Thomas.

We have had two BART (Baby Ace Restoration Team) sessions since his passing and we all feel his loss but are going on like he would want us too.

They say only the good die young and that is true. Earl was one of the best!

Gail Isaac

Former Newsletter Editor Paul Pakusch sent me some older newsletters with pictures and articles pertaining to Earl. These are from the September 2009 edition.

## Earl Luce Receives Tony Bingelis Award



Earl Luce just after being awarded The Tony Bingelis Award in Oshkosh this summer. He is surrounded by Tom Bowdler and Norm Isler. Other chapter members there to see him receive the award were Elise Isler, Laura Luce, and Dwight Meyers.



Earl Luce being congratulated by Mike Mellville, pilot of Space Ship One, first private enterprise spaceship to fly to outer space twice in short time.

Earl Luce has been a member of EAA Chapter 44 for more than 30 years, is a Technical Counselor, has provided countless teaching sessions and taught gas welding for EAA's workshops, makes contributions to EAA's magazines, and has an extensive list of homebuilding projects.

His greatest achievement came when he reverse-engineered plans for aviation legend Steve Wittman's Buttercup.

At the August Chapter meeting, Earl received a special award hand crafted by our fearless leader as a token of our admiration. Laura Luce, Earl's wife will be receiving a special award at our September meeting.



Earl, with wife Laura, show off the special bowling ball he received at the August meeting! Earl has a great story about it. Ask him!

If you know, you know!

### Air Shows 2023

**July 24 - 30**

Oshkosh Air Venture

**August 12 - 13**

Rochester International Air show at Rochester Int'l Airport (KROC)  
USAF Thunderbirds are supposed to be there!

**Sept 2 - 3**

"Wings over Batavia" Genesee County Airport in Batavia (KGVQ), with day and night events!  
Check out: [wingsoverbatavia.com](http://wingsoverbatavia.com)

From the March 2006 newsletter:

## Member Profile: Earl Luce

Earl Luce has made a name for himself by building a Buttercup reproduction of Steve Wittman's 1930's competitor to Piper, Aeronca and Taylorcraft aircraft. With no plans available, Earl took measurements and photos of the original Buttercup at Oshkosh and got advice from Jack Cox and Joe Schumacher at EAA headquarters. He drew up his own plans and built his Buttercup with some modifications.

Earl attracted plenty of attention the first time he flew the Buttercup to Airventure Oshkosh. He now runs LuceAir, which sells plans, videos, welded fuselages and engine mounts for both the Buttercup and the Tailwind. Visit his website at [www.LuceAir.com](http://www.LuceAir.com) for more information. The website also has a Buttercup log and a PDF file of an April 2003 Sport Aviation story about the Buttercup.



Courtesy of EAA

*When did you join EAA Chapter 44 and why?*  
1980 .....I wanted to build and fly!

*How are you involved with EAA 44?*  
Past president and long time EAA tech counselor. Also EAA Workshop welding instructor.

*Are you a builder, a (student) pilot, or aviation enthusiast?*  
My Buttercup was the 28th project I've been part of and 6 more since.

*What aircraft do you own, rent or otherwise fly?*  
My Tailwind and Buttercup. Also Tom Bowdler's Piet as well as anyone else who is dumb enough to give me keys

*Where do you like to fly?*  
I love to tear up the neighborhood with the Tailwind and give rides in the Buttercup. X-countries are getting more attention.

*Can you describe any interesting aviation adventures you've experienced?*  
7 trips to Oshkosh have all been different.

*If you're a builder or restorer, what are you building or restoring? Why did you choose this particular aircraft? How far along are you and can you comment on your experience with this project?*

Most projects are Rag & Tube .....I believe in the tried and true.

*Please describe any other aviation activities or organizations you are involved with.*  
Also belong to Chapter #674 Albion, sell plans and parts from my other job " Luceair " and write articles for EAA magazines as well as consult for them.

*Have you ever been to Airventure Oshkosh or other major fly-in events?*  
Oshkosh 15 + times.

*What do you enjoy about your involvement with aviation?*  
Can't get enough .....like a disease!

*What do you do for a living?*  
Design and manage car wash equipment.

*Please describe your family.*  
Wife Laura of 32 years, son Matt, his wife Becky and their son Mikey, and my daughter Shannon.

*Favorite food:* All food! Too much.

*Person you most look up to:* Steve Wittman

*What will your spouse or significant other say about your involvement in aviation?*  
She finally goes along with it! It only took 20 years!

### Notice:

On June 24th we have a Young Eagle day and I need escorts to take families to and from the airplanes safely. It is a fun job and you get to wear one of our fashionable safety vests. I need one adult to monitor the escorts and 6 escorts. Bart team members would be great and any others would be appreciated. I will be there to start until about noon since we also have a family wedding that afternoon.

Please call or text....

Gail Isaac 585-737-1205.

Earl's involvement with the Baby Ace Restoration Team (BART)



Earl with Jace and Dhruva



Rib Stitching, with Sharon Reithel, Jace Carey, Earl, Gail Isaac, and Mark Scheda



Wet sanding primer with Corey and Brodie Venturo  
(Peter Bonneau in cap looking down)



Calvin Maynard fitting instrument panel

In the short time I knew him, Earl had become like a brother to me. His generosity with time, knowledge, and talent was unbounded and he constantly showed it in the help he gave me in coming up the GA learning curve. He genuinely wanted me to experience the thrill of GA flight, and he dedicated himself to enabling me to do just that.



The pictures I attached here are from our 4-day trip to Tennessee to evaluate and bring home my Colt. It was a strenuous four days, especially the day we spent disassembling and prepping the plane I had just bought (my first ever) for travel from TN to NY. There is NO chance I could have done it without Earl's influence.

Even more than the tangible help he so generously gave, he showed me (and many others I'm sure) how to be a friend. I'll forever cherish the short but joyous time we had together.

Mark Scheda

Editor: There is more info on this trip in the January 2023 issue of The Flyer.





Elio and I are so saddened to hear this news. Earl was also so helpful to us and took us under his wing. He even taught me how to weld! (picture at left)

Our deepest sympathies to all,

Sincerely,

Clara Montalbano and  
Elio Dominguez-Montalbano

On Friday May 26th, while waiting for skydivers to come to Pine Hill and do their thing, I decided to take my scooter and visit Craig Ritson at his hangar in Gaines Valley. There, I was happy to learn that his new RV had passed inspection with no problems.

After a while, Earl and Jeff came over and I was stoked to finally meet Earl. As some of you may know, Earl did what was my job before me for Paul Guglielmi in his 210. I had heard many stories about Earl and the duo of Earl and Paul but had never met Earl in person, until that Friday at Craig's hangar.

Earl and I instantly clicked. We started talking about Paul, and how we miss him dearly. He started telling me stories about hunting with Paul and lots of fun times and adventures they had together. It was truly a pleasure to finally meet Earl. I had heard so much, and was looking forward to learning from him in the field of experimental aviation.

Once we parted ways, I truly was excited that I had met him and was eager to do so again. He was lovely to interact with and I was saddened by the news two days later.

Earl and Paul both lived their lives full of adventures and excitement. Really living, accomplishing dreams, to the fullest while having a great time.

Best, Eloy Yague-Spaude

## In Memory of Earl Luce

I first met Earl through the Baby Ace Restoration Team about two years ago. He soon became a teacher and a mentor, but even more so a friend. He was quick to impart knowledge, encouragement, and lollipops! For the past two years, he has taught me various skills from rope knots to fishing tricks to aircraft building and so much more. He often assigned me "homework" to learn new knots, with his favorites being the "bowline" and "getaway hitch." One of my favorite memories of Earl was during Gaines Valley's open house in September 2022. He was flying, chatting, and giving plane rides to people left and right. Despite his busy schedule, he found the time to take me for a ride in a Cessna 150. We flew along the lake shore and did various maneuvers, such as stalls, steep turns, chandelles, and wing-overs. That flight was also one of my first times taking off and landing on a grass field airstrip.

The impact Earl has had on my life is significant. He has taught me many valuable lessons that I will always carry with me. I am so incredibly thankful to Earl for this expertise, advice, and legacy.

Earl, we all miss you.

- Sharon Reithel

There is a great article about Earl Luce and Jeff LaChausse ferrying a Buttercup 1300 miles in the November 2020 Flyer. Here is the link:

<https://chapters.eaa.org/ea44/-/media/40b48803c15b49c391b2d707183de580.ashx>

Earl Luce was straight-up serious and possessed an immense amount of technical knowledge, skills, and unique methods for building airplanes. For me, it was a rocky start getting to know him, but over time as I matured, he was the person who would be forgiving and was always ready to give advice. Earl took the time to teach me how to weld. I still have the tubing that I practiced on a few years ago. He also taught me how to work with fabric and woodworking as well. I will never forget how we used a rubbish bin to curve tubing for the Baby Ace rudder. It just goes to show that this man was ingenious.

I'm notorious for being overly involved and passionate about aviation. Hence, I work actively with five different organizations throughout the week, all of which (except for Boy Scouts) are aviation related in some form or other. When, how, what, and why I do these things deserves a separate email or an entire separate book at this point.

Of the six organizations I've been working with, the Baby Ace Restoration Team, which is hosted by the Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 44 in Brockport, is the first one I encountered and is responsible for getting me involved in aviation in the first place. BART is a team of aviation enthusiasts, both young and old, who are restoring a home-built Corben Baby Ace Aircraft from the 1950s. I have been with the EAA and BART for over five years. When we started, we were a team of several adults and around four juniors, including me. I have bonded with all of them in some way or another. Over the five years, some of the adult advisors have passed away; Bruce Willis, Frank Grossman, Jim Gooding, and now Earl. Their commitment and memories have deeply touched me and the local aviation community. I still miss these people to this day.

I was not Earl's closest friend, but I know he was one of the best teachers that God had given to the BART team. His loss will affect the entire community, whether we knew him personally or not.

Respectfully,

Dhruva Singh Rana VI

## EAA Chapter 44 Calendar

### Next General Gathering

Next Gathering: June 20, 2023  
 Dinner @ 6:30 pm, \$5 donation  
 Dinner is Hot Dogs and Burgers.  
 Gathering is @ 7:30 pm.  
 Our presentation is Jerry Fly, who recently obtained his PPL at RAC, bought an RV in California and flew it back here.  
 SAC Work Day - Saturday before General Gathering, 10 am.

**Young Eagle Workshop Daycamp is:**  
**August 19 & 20, 2023**

**Young Eagles Events are scheduled for:**  
**June 24, 2023**  
**August 26, 2023**  
**September 23, 2023**  
**October 21, 2023**

**All activities take place at the Sport Aviation Center of Western New York, and are free and open to the public, unless otherwise noted.**

**Sport Aviation Center, EAA Chapter 44**  
 44 Eisenhower Drive, Brockport, NY 14420  
 Brockport Airport / Ledgesdale Airpark (7G0) 43° 10' 56" N, 77° 55' 1" W

**Board Meetings**  
 2nd Monday of the month

**General Gatherings**  
 3rd Tuesday of the month  
 \$5 Dinner 6:30 pm, Meeting 7:30 pm

**BART** - Every Wednesday 6pm to 9pm,

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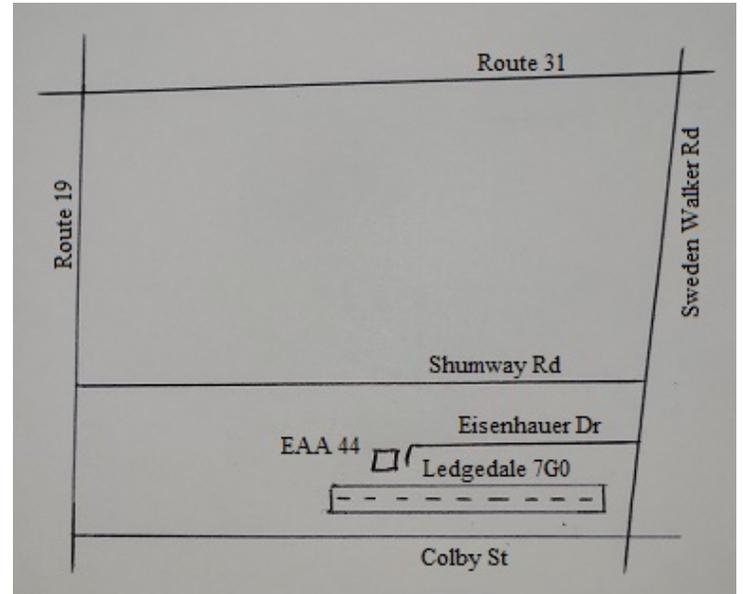
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