



FEBRUARY 2025
Volume 3, Issue 5



CAVU Chronicles

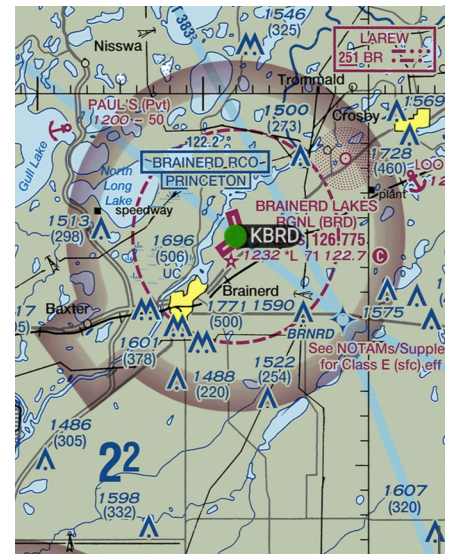
CHAPTER 1610 HOLIDAY DINNER

To quote a one-time popular radio host, “It was a quiet week in Lake Wobegone” as was January at Chapter 1610. The highlight for the month’s activities and news was our annual holiday dinner party held at Breezy Point’s Antlers Restaurant.

This venue was our third over the past three years and, if consensus serves me correctly, I think we will definitely be returning there next year. The space, ambiance, food, and wait staff were all top-notch.

This year’s event we welcomed KAITLYN MIDDELSTADT as a dinner guest. As you may recall, she is one of our Chapter 1610 Aviation Scholarship awardees. Kaitlyn is currently attending Central Lakes College prior to transferring to North Dakota State University where her studies will be focused towards a degree in Aviation.

Accompanying Kaitlyn were her boyfriend Eric, her mother Laura and her grandparents Allen and Dianna Jenkins. During dinner conversations, I learned a recurring theme in the Middelstadt/Jenkins families is “volunteerism” at the EAA Oshkosh AirVenture. Allen and Dianna have been regulars there for years. Laura, pictured below, can be found working with the crews who manage and coordinate programs at the Ultralight Fun Fly Zone.



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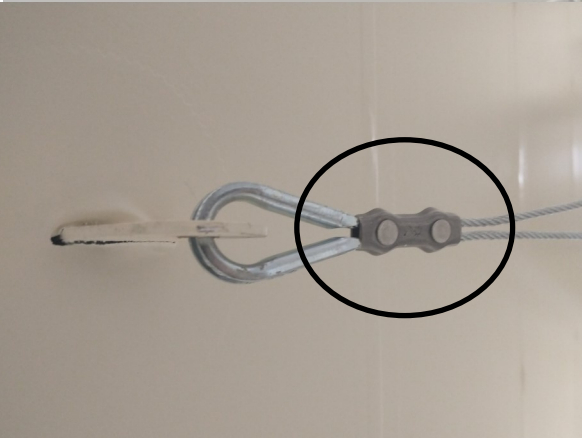
- Holiday Dinner
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- The Light-Air Side

ONE MORE THING...

In addition to Antlers setting the stage for a fine meal and lively conversation, this event was also a fundraiser. Donations collected went towards the Chapter 1610 Aviation Scholarship Fund. Due to their awesome generosity, the collective efforts of the group pictured below raised \$1,745. Words are not enough in my saying, on behalf of everyone at EAA Chapter 1610, a heartfelt and sincere "THANK YOU". We are off to a great start as we strive to reach our target for 2025.



Pictured here with Jane and Mark is
Kaitlyn Middelstadt



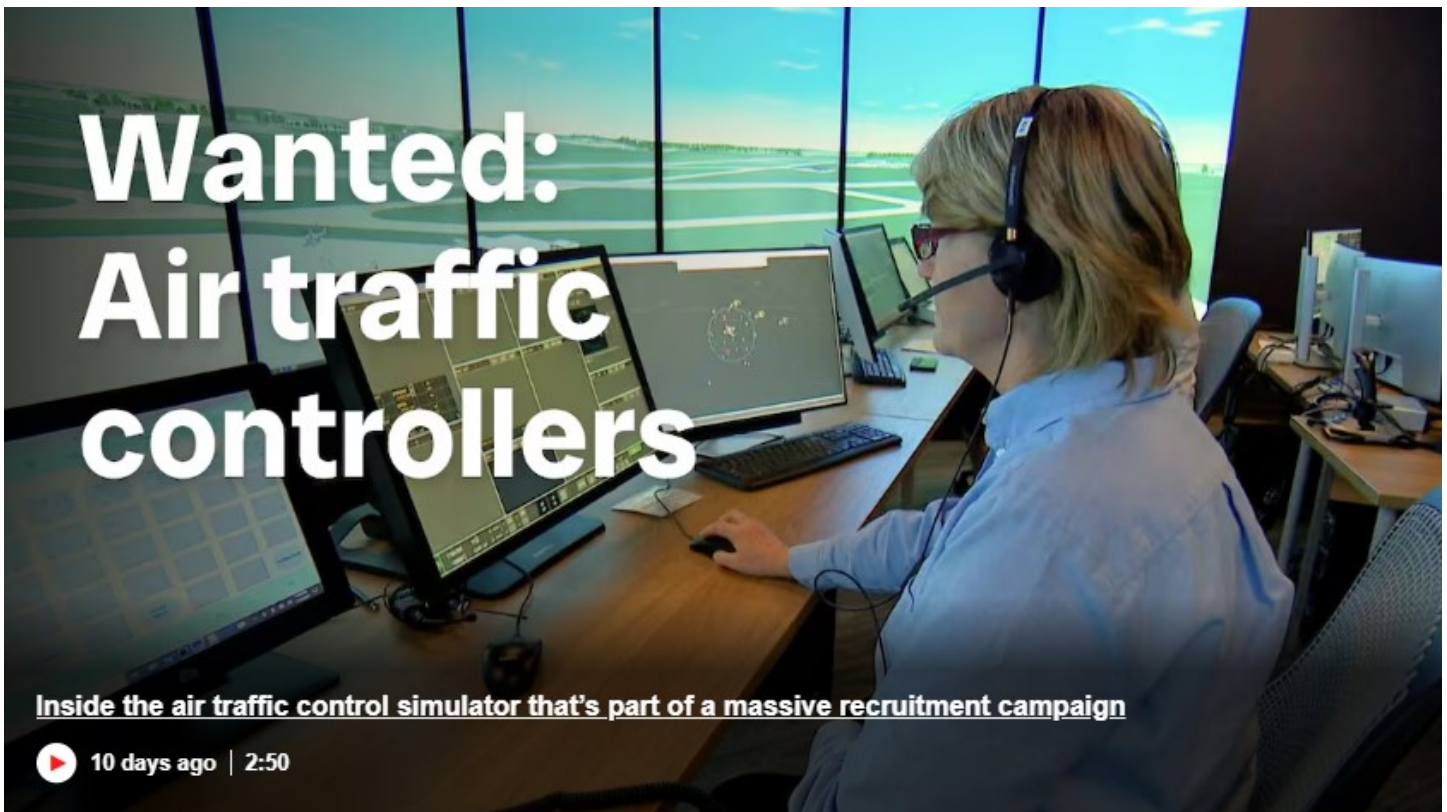
Detail work continued. Low profile cable clamps were applied at all anchor points and turnbuckles. Rollie fabricated a sheet-metal engine cowling. Cable adjustments were fine-tuned to level the wings with a slight dihedral angle. While not easily visible in the photo below, the tail wheel was attached.





I guess this would qualify Carissa Peterson as the first “test pilot” for the Longster. You will recall she is another one of the recipients of the Chapter 1610 Aviation Scholarship. She paid a visit to the hangar to see the progress we’ve been making before heading back to Longview, Texas to resume her studies in aviation at the Christian Polytechnic LeTourneau University.





Inside the air traffic control simulator that's part of a massive recruitment campaign

Nav Canada, which manages air traffic control at the nation's airports, says a shortage of air traffic controllers has forced the cancellation of flights and caused delays.

I discovered this story from an online news feed. Even though it comes from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), it demonstrates that staff shortages in aviation-related careers is an international concern. To view this 2:50 news-clip in it's entirety, go to ...

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/9.6615583>



This article was brought to our attention by Dick Piepgras. It is reproduced from The Cowboy State Daily, written by Andrew Rossi, published January 25, 2025.

Pilot On Mission to Save Nearly 100-Year-Old Historic Wyoming Airmail Post.

A small shed and a 50-foot tower standing at the end of a 4,000-foot-long dirt runway near Medicine Bow are astonishingly intact relics from a pivotal period in American history. The SLO-32 Medicine Bow Airport might be the last and best of its kind in the United States.

That's why Nathan Finneman, a Colorado pilot and historical aviation enthusiast, has taken to the skies and the internet with his grassroots effort to save the airport before it's lost to history. If he succeeds, it'll give Medicine Bow a busier future by preserving an important site from its past.

"From a historical standpoint, it's remarkable but forgotten," he told Cowboy State Daily. "A lot of these sites are long gone, but everything in Medicine Bow is still standing. There's something magical about this spot, and it was my calling to save it."

In the 1930s, the United States Postal Service (USPS) was at a technological crossroads. Two factions were arguing over the best way to deliver mail across the country.

"They were deciding whether train service or the new airplane transportation service was better and more efficient," Finneman said. "So, they developed an air mail route system from the West Coast to the East Coast."

The Woodrow Wilson Airway was the first transcontinental airmail route, stretching between New York and San Francisco, California. Airmail pilots would relay mail between planes at these airports, using the same methods (and much of the same routes) as the Pony Express.

One stretch of this state-of-the-art aeronautical navigation project was the Salt Lake to Omaha (SLO) route, which stretched across southern Wyoming. Airstrips were constructed where open cockpit planes could land, refuel and continue.

Intermediate landing fields were established every 25 miles on the SLO route, marked by a 50-foot tower with a rotating beacon at the top, powered by acetylene gas kept in a "weather house" at the tower's base. In clear weather, the beacon could be seen up to ten miles away.

The SLO-32 Medicine Bow Airport was established in 1929 as the 32nd airstrip along the SLO route. Finneman said that between 1929 and 1935, this middle-of-nowhere airport in Wyoming "really shined" as one of the most technologically advanced stops along the route.

"There were some state-of-the-art technological developments installed at SLO-32 that most other airports didn't have," he said. "Things like weather reporting and navigation through radio. It became a stopping hub for a lot of pilots, especially when they were trying to get across the mountain ranges south and east of Medicine Bow."

The USPS airmail experiment revolutionized the future of mail delivery in the United States, with 18 terminal airfields, 89 emergency airfields and more than 500 beacons.

However, the rapid advancement of airplane technology quickly made the Woodrow Wilson Airway obsolete. SLO-32 continued operating as an airmail airport until the 1950s when the federal government transferred the land and infrastructure to the state of Wyoming.

STILL STANDING

While many of the airstrips from Wyoming's SLO sites still exist, that's usually all that remains of the historic airmail airports. Their most enduring legacy on the landscape are the 70-foot concrete arrows that were the pilots' primary means of navigation.

"Those were the literal guidance system for early pilots," Finneman said. "They'd be flying at a certain altitude, see the cement arrow, and change the course of their aircraft to the direction that those arrows were aiming toward. That's how they navigated back then."

Finneman was following those arrows in his paramotor open cockpit airplane, retracing the SLO route, when he landed on the dirt runway at Medicine Bow. For a moment, he felt like he'd landed back into the 1930s.

The towers and structures built for the other SLO airports were either dismantled, destroyed or neglected to the point of collapse. Despite their age and the ferocity of Wyoming's weather, all the structures at SLO-32 were intact.



"It's in wonderful shape for how old it is," he said. "The tower and shed are still standing, and the beacon is still in place. The main airstrip is one of the nicer dirt strips for landings at any of these sites I've been to, even if the cross runway is full of badger and gopher holes."

The 95-year-old buildings might look dilapidated to passersby, but Finneman knows them remarkably well preserved. Now, he's concerned these rare relics of history might not be standing much longer.

"These structures have endured some of the worst weather conditions for 95 years," he said. They're all in relatively good shape – I'd give it a 5 out of 10 – but I don't know how much longer they will be there. They need to be saved."

SAVE SLO-32

Finneman's first impressions of SLO-32 have stuck with him. He's on a mission to do whatever it takes to preserve the historic airport, but that's easier said than done.

The airport sits on state-owned land leased to the town of Medicine Bow. Brian Lashley, the town's director of Public Works, has been maintaining the site as best he can.

"I would say the main frames are good, but we've got to do some repair on the roofs and maybe a side wall or two," Lashley told Cowboy State Daily. "We haven't dug into it too greatly, but by just quick observation, it looks like the main bones of it are fine. We just need to get a new roof and a door on it, fix some windows and stuff like that."

Finneman said it's hard to find resources for any renovation, let alone the extensive work needed to ensure the tower stays standing. SLO-32 has many potential funding avenues, but none look especially promising.

"At this current moment, it's just a dirt strip with an old tower that people are trying to save," he said. "The Federal Flight Administration still lists it as an active airport, but it's not interested in funding something like this. So, no federal funding. The State of Wyoming has the ability to fund it, but we've run into dead ends, and then there's the timeframe it will take to get it."

Lashley said the town of Medicine Bow recently elected some officers for the new airport board. They've already had a few meetings but are just getting started with exploring the possibilities for the preservation and restoration of SLO-32.

"We need more members to become officers, so we're looking for anyone that's interested to come join," he said. "Once we get some subcommittees, we'll be pressing forward."

With local, state, and federal resources unattainable or in short supply, Finneman is taking a more hands-on approach. That means SLO-32 has been and could be busier than ever.



Being an airmail pilot in the early 20th century was a risky and dangerous business. Some estimates say at least one of every 10 air-mail planes that flew across the country crashed.

Pilot Nathan Finneman...on a mission to save this 100 year-old airmail post near Medicine Bow, Wyoming



MUGS, HATS AND FLY-INS

In his effort to save the still-standing structures at SLO-32, Finneman has started a grassroots campaign to raise funds and increase awareness of the historic airport. He sells clothing, mugs, bags, and other items on [his website, Airmail Aviator](#), where he also posts about the airport's history and urgent maintenance needs.

"Part of the proceeds are being put directly into a fund to fix the airport itself," he said. "Private funding and donations can get some small but essential stuff done. Someone out there can donate a roof, paint, or a power grid."

To increase the visibility of his efforts, Finneman organized a fly-in last year. He and a handful of other pilots flew their vintage paramotor airplanes to SLO-32 and lined up along the runway. He's planning another fly-in for Fall 2025 and hopes to make it an annual event.

"My objective is to eventually have 50 airplanes all lined up during one of the fly-ins, with everybody camping out on the site," he said. "It's great tourism for Medicine Bow, and you'll have an aviation aura around the airport. There's so much history there, and I think it could kickstart a fire inside the younger generations, making them want to fly airplanes."

Lashley supports Finneman's vision and ambition.

"I think it'd be great for Medicine Bow," he said. "People can fly in and come to the Virginian, visit our businesses and experience the town. We had eight or nine planes fly in last summer, and that was awesome." Finneman eventually hopes to redo the interior of the weather house, stabilize the tower, and repaint the tower and cement arrow. His efforts will culminate in the restoration of the rotating beacon at the top of the tower, which has been dark for over 50 years.

"I want to see that rotating beacon spin like it did 95 years ago," he said. "Countless friends have come out and said they spend days helping me fix it. Our biggest barrier right now is getting the funding."

Lashley said Medicine Bow is following a promising lead that could restore power to the tower, but more work will be needed before it becomes operational.

"The beacon needs a new globe and possibly some other work," he said. "We have to get the globe and some electricity before we can test it. We're working with High Plains Power, which priced it at \$2,500, but we're hoping they might love us enough to donate some of that - or all of it."

CAN'T GET IT ANYWHERE ELSE

Finneman has been an aviation enthusiast since childhood and has spent his career working in and around aircraft. However, he said he's never felt and flown freer than in the skies of Wyoming.

"Wyoming has a magical experience to it," he said. "When I fly in my open cockpit airplane, 100 feet off the ground, there isn't a worry in the world. It still feels like the Wild West in some places, and you can't get that anywhere else."

Flying over Wyoming and landing at SLO-32 inspired him to "hunker down and try to save this historic spot." Medicine Bow's airport is an important relic in American aviation history and could be the last intact Airmail airport.

"It's fantastic to know that it dates that far back, and we can preserve it," Lashley said. "We've had some people reach out, so we're gaining momentum, and we're just getting started."

The historical context and excellent preservation of SLO-32 are inspiring enough. For Finneman, saving the airport is about more than history - it's a fixture of the past that makes Wyoming wonderful today and can ensure the same for the future.

"You have a calling in life every once in a while, but this little flame continues to grow and grow," he said.

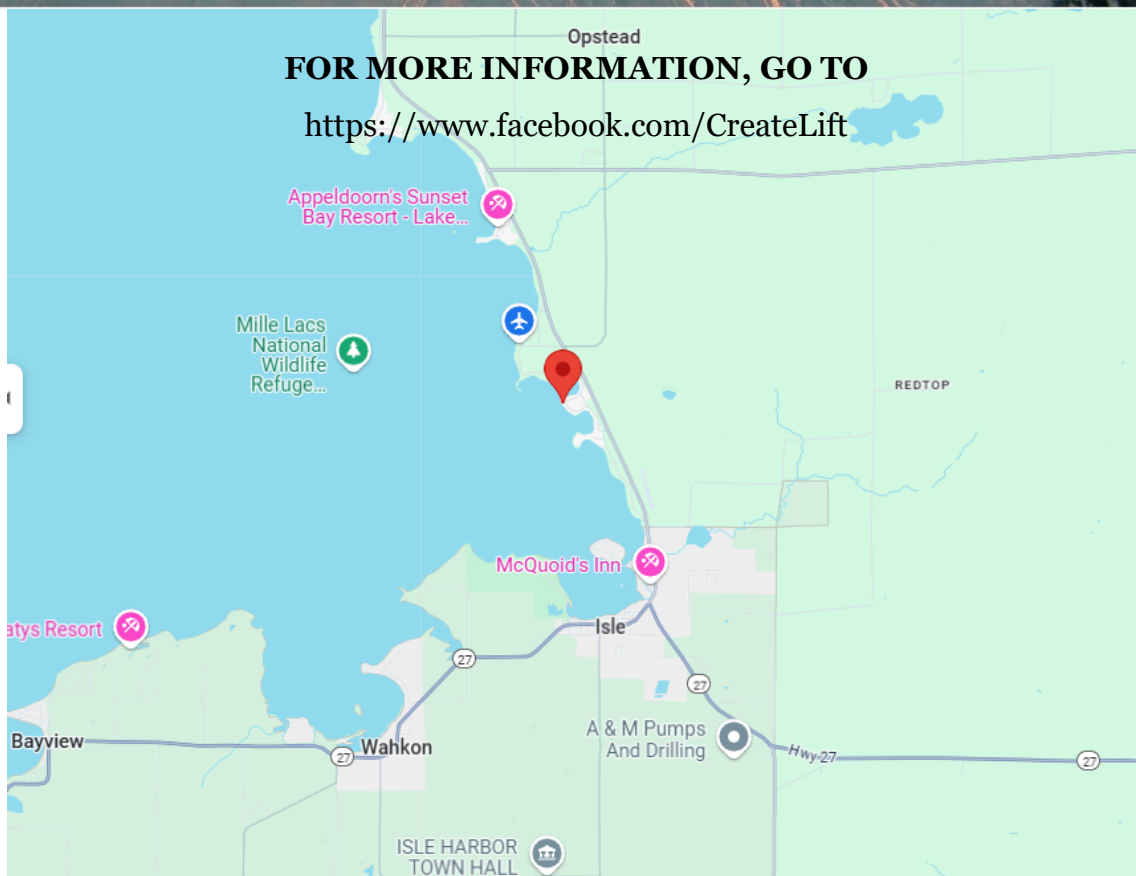
"Decades from now, some kid could land his plane here, learn about what happened at this place 150 years ago, and visit Medicine Bow. They could have the same experience I had when I first landed at SLO-32. You can't get that anywhere else."

UPCOMING EVENTS

ICEPORT 2025

Sat, Mar 1, 2025
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

43469 Vista Road
Isle MN 56342



FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO

<https://www.facebook.com/CreateLift>



AITKIN FLYERS / EAA CHAPTER 965

2025 SKI PLANE AND WHEELS CHILI/ HOTDOG FLY-IN

March 8

10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

KAIT - Aitkin Municipal Airport

Paved Runway 16/34 and Snow Strip 8/26! Frequency, 123.05.

Get the winter rust off and come join the Aitkin Flyers for a ski plane and wheels fly-in with delicious chili and hot dogs! Join your fellow pilots in hangar talk, camaraderie and food!

Contact: Trudi Amundson - trudiamundson@yahoo.com



DID YOU KNOW...?

An easy and convenient way to keep up-to-date on scheduled Chapter 1610 meetings, events, and other aviation-related programs is our Website.

First, open your web browser and type in **#caa 1610**.

Once you open the website, select the tab **Event Calendar**.

The rest is easy.



I am always interested in hearing your suggestions for future topics in the Newsletter. I also encourage budding authors to submit content.

Please contact Mark Bearss

♦ email to
mgbearss@gmail.com

♦ Text to 952-818-9986

And finally, the contact information for Chapter 1610 has changed.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Any highlights below in **RED** means something has been added or rescheduled for Chapter 1610 meetings and events.

February 8: Regular Meeting and FAASTeam Presentation by Trudi Amundson. “Good Landings”

March 1: **ICEPORT 2025**

March 8: Regular Meeting

March 8: Aitkin Flyers Chili Feed and Fly-in

April 12: Regular Chapter Meeting

ON THE ‘LIGHTAIR’ SIDE



The REAL “Longster Update” Story:



A student pilot is on a solo cross-country flight in a.. let’s say DH82 Tiger Moth when he has an engine failure. He makes a perfect emergency landing in a field and the farmer has a phone – not all that common in those days. He calls the flying school and gives an accurate position of the field where his undamaged aircraft is sitting.

The chief instructor decides to fly to this spot in another Tiger Moth to pick him up, with an engineer for the stricken aircraft to be fixed.

He finds the aircraft sitting in a corner of an impossibly small field. How did a student pilot, with a failed engine, manage to pull that one off? As the chief instructor, he can’t be seen to be less skillful than a low-time student, so he makes an approach as low, and as slow as he can. Puts the Tiger Moth down perfectly just after clearing a hedge but is unable to bring it to a stop before diving into the hedge at the opposite side.

Humiliated, he asks the student who was watching how he had managed that feat?

“Sir”, the student said, “I landed in that much larger field over there. We just pulled it over here to give you more room to land.”