

Own, Don't Rent

a flying site editorial ...



The flying field of the Twin City Radio Controllers is the club's fifth flying site. After years of wandering, the membership decided decades ago that in order to have a permanent home, the club must own, not rent. It is nearly impossible for an owner to be removed from his land whereas a renter can be booted out on a whim. Land owners are residents who have representation in the local government ... renters are outsiders.

It was controversial at the time. There were only three other RC clubs in the country that owned their flying sites. It required a mortgage. It seemed risky. Some membership was lost. But it turned out to be a brilliant decision.

A few years later, TCRC was booted out anyway. If the club had been a renter, that probably would have been the end of TCRC. But it was an eminent-domain acquisition. The state paid TCRC so generously that TCRC bought an even better site - its current location. The mortgage was paid off years ago with celebration. TCRC has very good relations with its neighbors and is now accepted as a community resource.



Several RC clubs in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area will lose their flying sites when the economy improves. For now, land prices, down payments and mortgage interest rates are historically low. Now is an opportunity to purchase that may never come again.

Here are some lessons learned from TCRC's experience:

- Form a search committee. Expect a lot of hard work. Years maybe.
- Purchase a minimum of 40 acres well away from homes and highways.
- Consider parks and landfills too.
- Acquire access, zoning, overflight and retrieval rights in writing. If the land is being purchased from the owner of surrounding land, this can be written into the purchase agreement. In TCRC's case, the land is flood plain that is zoned for crops, recreation and sport aviation.
- Be totally upfront and honest with neighbors and city officials. Stress that you will be good neighbors and an asset to the community. Tell them about model aviation. Invite them to flying demos. Point out the alternatives. (One alternative to TCRC was a dirt-bike club.)
- Find funds to supplement dues for the mortgage and property taxes. TCRC's down payment came from air shows. Most of the land was leased for crops. The annual auction and the Minnesota Wildlife Conservation program helped.

TCRC had only 40 members at the time.

Additional articles by David Andersen are available at www.MNBigBirds.com