

Christian Airmen Take Over Airport; It's Now Nonprofit

By RAY DEARLOVE

Courier-Express Staff Reporter

AKRON AIRPORT has been taken over by the nonprofit Christian Airmen's Fellowship Inc. of Western New York (CAF) in what could be the first move of its kind in the nation.

The airport was purchased from Akron Aviation Inc. for \$750,000 several months ago by CAF and is now a complete nonprofit operation except for the maintenance function. The new owners claim it is the first nonprofit fixed base operator business in Western New York and possibly the U.S.

Akron Aviation had owned and operated the airport since 1965 except for a 1½-year period when the airport was leased to Cox Aviation of Rochester. Until it was sold to CAF, the airport had always been operated on a for-profit basis.

WHEN AKRON AVIATION acquired Akron Airport in 1965, the 34-acre facility consisted of a single grass strip runway, a partially-completed metal hangar, and a T-type wooden hangar. Since then, there have been many improvements made.

A paved 3,500-foot long main runway was added in 1969, along with the paving of taxiways, aprons and turnoffs. Several hangars were constructed, the latest of which was a 12,000-square-foot, \$50,000 facility completed in 1973.

Paul V. Yoder and Paul D. Kelly were the principles of Akron Aviation. They were joined in October 1965 by LaVerne Boschart who took over the aircraft maintenance operation of the airport.

BOSCHART ALSO TOOK over the flight operations in 1975, under a lease arrangement for both the flight and maintenance functions. At that point, the flight operations end was not being operated profitably.

Both operations proved too much for Boschart. He was a pilot himself, and among the

other pilots using Akron Aviation facilities were Ralph Marsteller and Robert Caple.

These three had an idea in 1973, since all three were Christian minded, of combining their belief in Christ with their love of flying. To share this common faith in both, the trio decided to form the Christian Airmen's Fellowship of Western New York and incorporate it as a nonprofit business entity.

CAF WAS FORMED IN September, 1973, with Marsteller as president. Although there is a national organization called the Christian Airmen's Fellowship, the Akron group is not affiliated with it.

Other pilots using the Akron airport soon joined the newly-formed CAF. Robert Cherdron, president of Baptist Life Assn.'s Clarence office, joined the CAF as vice president.

Kermit Schlitzer became secretary of the Christian flying group and John Jesson became treasurer. The CAF members were soon meeting in monthly fellowship meetings while increasing their proficiency in flying skills.

WHEN THE OPERATION of Akron Aviation became a burden for Boschart, the CAF decided to step in. The organization took over the airport operation lease in March 1976, except for the maintenance which Boschart continued to head.

The CAF then purchased its own Cessna 172 aircraft, plus four other aircraft from Akron Aviation. In May of 1976, the CAF heard that Akron Aviation was being put up for sale by Yoder and Kelly and the purchase of the operation followed.

The name then reverted back to Akron Airport and the airport started operation as a nonprofit entity except for the maintenance function, which is still headed by Boschart on a for-profit basis. All work involved in the nonprofit flight end is

done on a volunteer basis by CAF members.

IN ADDITION TO treasurer Jesson became airport manager and was instrumental in the success of the nonprofit venture. To date, 27 fellow Christian pilots have become members of the CAF at Akron.

Since the CAF took over Akron Airport, aircraft tie-down facilities have been increased to accommodate up to 30 planes and there is now hangar space for up to 40 planes. In the planning stage is a new 10-bay hangar to be added this or next year.

Akron Airport is being operated as a commercial fixed base operator but nonprofit, and is open to anyone seeking use of the facilities for flight instruction, or other airport uses. The general public is invited to use the airport facilities on a standard fee basis and only those interested in general aviation and who have received Christ as their Savior are invited to join the CAF.

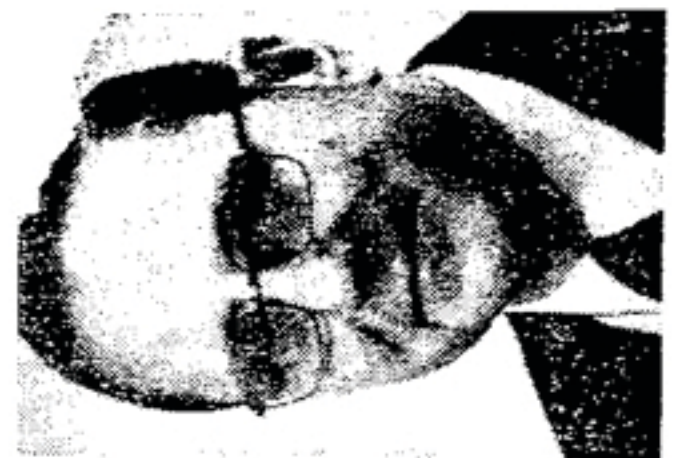
CAF MEMBERS receive favorable rates, as do members of the nonaffiliated Akron Flying Club. There are two types of CAF membership, regular and associate.

The bulk of the CAF airport operation is being handled by Marsteller, Cherdron and Jesson. Marsteller works in the traffic department of International Multifoods Corp. and Jesson is a truck driver.

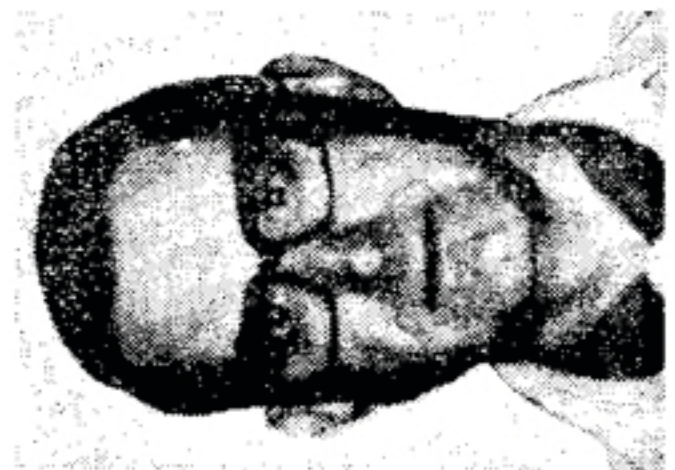
One of the keys to the success of the CAF airport ownership is the volunteer labor in maintaining it. As Cherdron put it the "break-even airport operation often depends on the cost of wages."

Akron Airport is one of the few private airport facilities in the state having paved and lighted full-length taxiway turnoffs and aprons.

And it is written 40:31 that "They with wings as"



Robert Cherdron



John Jesson



Ralph Marsteller