



TYLER SIMPSON / SPECIAL TO THE ITEM

More than 20 biplanes landed in Sumter Airport Sunday morning, where the South Carolina Breakfast Club met to fraternize about planes. The club meets in Sumter once a year.

Planes, bacon and eggs

South Carolina Breakfast Club
pilots celebrate 75-year mark

BY TYLER SIMPSON

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Ask Americans outside South Carolina, and they'll likely say our state is home to plenty of palmetto trees, Myrtle Beach and Fort Sumter, the location of the first battle during the Civil War. But what most people probably don't know is that it's also home to the South Carolina Breakfast Club, the only one of its kind in the entire country.

More than 20 biplanes flew into the Sumter Airport on Sunday morning, carrying a diverse group of commercial, professional and recreational flyers who share a love for all things plane-related. Members meet biweekly at different locations across South Carolina to socialize over bacon, eggs and orange juice.

"The club is definitely something to be proud of," said Gerald Ballard, president of the South Carolina Breakfast Club. "There is nothing else like it in the United States, and no other state is capable of putting something like this together every two weeks."

Established in 1938, Thomas S. Summers

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founded the organization, formerly known as the South Carolina Aviation Association, in Orangeburg for the sole purpose of promoting safe flying for pilots everywhere. The largest and oldest club of its kind in the country, its biweekly meetings have only ceased during World War II when fuel restrictions were set.

Despite years of membership deaths, war and increasing gas prices, the club has continued to flourish since its founding, even without membership dues and meeting requirements. Anyone can become a member simply by attending a single meeting.

Though it's not a money-making club, Ballard commented that its members "don't mind losing money, but they love the fellowship."

"This club belongs to nobody except for the people sitting here today," Ballard said. "Without the people here, we wouldn't be doing this today."

A resident of Twin Lakes, Ballard has served as the club's president and spokesman since 1979, promoting the safety aspect of flying for all members and keeping pilots across South Carolina current.

"The whole reason for changing location of meetings is to keep the pilots sharp," Ballard said.

"We move to a different airport every two weeks so the pilots can fly in and continue performing great landings."

As part of the club's efforts to promoting safe flying, During every meeting, Ballard presents an "infamous" award given the member who performs the worst landing: a blue bouncy ball. The recipient of the ball then adds his name to the ball's collection of signatures.

"Just about everybody here at today's meeting has received the ball at least once," said Bob Taylor, president of the Experimental Aircraft Association, Chapter 1456. "It's just a fun way to help our members continue to perform safe air traveling."

Ballard described the social gathering as not just a club, but a family of more than 8,000 members that continues to

grow every year. Pilots from other states such as New York and Florida have also gained membership by flying all the way to South Carolina to fraternize with their fellow pilots, according to Ballard.

Members not only meet to socialize and have breakfast together, but also to keep updated on the latest news and happenings in the aviation world. Members of Sunday's meeting, after hearing about a tragedy in Florida, kept in their prayers Mark Curto, a 62-year old man who jumped from a plane to this death after his parachute failed to open.

The club's next meeting will take place on Nov. 3 at Orangeburg Municipal Airport, celebrating its 75 year anniversary. To see the club's full schedule, go to www.flyscbc.com.



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South Carolina Breakfast Club members gathered Sunday morning to socialize about aviation and enjoy breakfast together. The club meets every two weeks at a different location in South Carolina.