



WINTER-  
SPRING 2026



## President's Message

Welcome, fellow aviators, to a new year in aviation. I previously served as Aero Club President from 2016-17 and am excited to return for a brief term alongside new Vice President Steve Devine. In 2026, we will certainly not be serving alone. We have a strong slate of directors, committee chairs, and officers working together to keep this historic club vibrant and impactful within aviation in the Delaware Valley.

One of those committee chairs is Steve Jordan, who is leading our 2026 scholarship program. Please see page 5 for details, and help spread the word to young aviators at your local airport.

Recent board member Alyssa Mazzenga volunteered to coordinate our silent auction and did an outstanding job, helping us achieve our most successful year yet in raising funds for scholarships.

Many other dedicated volunteers are recognized on the following page.

Michael Dunleavy

## Wright Brothers Dinner

On December 17, the Aero Club hosted the annual Wright Brothers Dinner at the Desmond Hotel, welcoming more than 75 guests. The evening included a reception, cash bar, free bourbon tasting, dinner, dessert, and a silent auction. Our featured speaker, Adam Basaran, traveled from Akron, Ohio to share insights about the Goodyear blimp. Adam has been a blimp pilot since 2013 and now flies the latest Zeppelin-built semi-rigid airships developed with the well-known German manufacturer. Adam fascinated the audience with details on how the airships function and how they travel across the country. Adam's employer, the Goodyear Tire & Rubber company, donated a flight for two, which was actioned off and helped raise money for scholarships as part of our silent auction.

Including the blimp flight, our annual silent auction raised \$9,000, a record for that part of our fundraiser. The blimp flight raised over \$5,000. Board member Alyssa Mazzenga coordinated this year's auction, with the help of Nancy Kyle and others.

Alyssa recounts the effort in her article on page 2.

President John Brennan presided over a requisite annual member meeting to vote in five new board members for a three year term. The board will meet in January to elect officers for 2026, including an anticipated new president and vice president.

Mr. Brennan also provided the audience with a year-in-review of Aero Club activities for 2025. John recounted a number of events in which the Aero Club participated, coordinated and/or attended.

Mr. Paul Heintz, ESQ., our longtime solicitor was acknowledged near the end of the event, for his decades of contributions to the Aero Club, including helping to revive and establish our scholarship programs. Mr. Heintz will retire as our solicitor after over 60 years of service to our club.

The evening ended around 9PM.



Page 4: Record heli flight



Page 6: Flying in France



Ninety-Nines members at annual dinner



## Silent Auction | Alyssa Mazzenga

Each year, the Aero Club hosts a silent auction at our annual dinner to raise money for scholarships. When I volunteered to coordinate the auction, I was admittedly a little nervous—but I quickly learned how much support surrounded the effort. I'd like to sincerely thank Nancy Kyle, Deb Harding, Jim Kilduff, and Rob Dant for their outstanding help throughout the process, as well as Michael Little and Jeremy Polk for stepping in on the day of the event.

In addition to the generous contribution from the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, the gift baskets once again generated the most excitement. We also auctioned the familiar favorites—books, aircraft models, and dinner packages. Of particular interest to me were the large aviation photographs provided by Deb Harding and the striking plate-glass aircraft artwork from Rob Morrow.

We received a number of excellent last-minute auction items, all of which were simply too good to turn away. That said, next year we may suggest an earlier donation deadline to help streamline preparation for the dinner and make the process even smoother. Overall, I am grateful for having been involved in this successful fundraiser.



Silent auction items and bid sheets.

## Aero Club participates in history event | Deb Harding

On January 3, at the historic Athenaeum in Philadelphia, members of the Aero Club volunteered for the first of 52 weeks of events marking the 250th anniversary of America. Exactly 233 years earlier, in January 1793, French aeronaut Jean-Pierre Blanchard chose the young nation's capital of Philadelphia to launch the first manned balloon flight in America. The ascent took place within the walls of Walnut Street Prison, on the ground where the Athenaeum now stands. Watched by President George Washington himself, the balloon lifted off from Philadelphia and came to rest in Woodbury, New Jersey.

The Aero Club was represented by myself, Walt Ellis, Carris Kocher, and Erik Kocher. We were proud to represent general aviation in the Delaware Valley. Event organizers were delighted by strong turnout and extensive media coverage. The crowd was enthusiastic, with many thoughtful questions.

I was reminded of our Aero Club logo, which depicts a witch on a broomstick—an image inspired by Benjamin Franklin's reaction to the first human balloon flights: "A few months since, the idea of witches riding thro' the air upon a broomstick, would have appeared equally impossible and ridiculous."

Separately, we have begun an effort to refurbish the N.J. site of Blanchard's landing. Today, the modest location sits quietly behind retail outlets and is in a state of significant disrepair.



Replica Blanchard basket on loan from New England Air Museum. Built by world renowned gas balloon builder Bert Padelt (Bally, PA).



Promoting aviation in the  
greater Delaware Valley

1399 Narcissa Ave  
Blue Bell, PA 19422

Organized Dec 17, 1909

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Editor: Robert Dant

Contributors: Carris Kocher, Nancy  
Kyle, Walt Ellis, James Kilduff

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### Officers

PRESIDENT: Michael Dunleavy  
VICE PRES: Steve Devine  
SECRETARY: Carris Kocher  
ASST SECR: Elaine Farashian  
TREASURER: John O'Toole  
ASST TREAS: John Stubbs  
SOLICITOR: Jeff Kahn

### Committee Chairs

MEMBERSHIP: Robert Morrow  
SPEC PROJECTS: Walter Ellis  
SCHOLARSHIPS: Steve Jordan  
COMMUNICATION: Robert Dant  
AIRPORTS: Elaine Farashian  
NOMINATING: James Kilduff

### Scholarship Trustees

John Brennan (Ex Officio), Michael Dunleavy, Bruce Thompson

www.aeroclubpa.org  
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### Board of Directors

#### 3-Year Term

Elaine Farashian  
Michael Dunleavy  
Robert Morrow  
Nancy Kyle  
Peter Bruemmer

#### 2-Year Term

Ethan Crane  
Erin DeYoung  
Steven Lindrooth  
Michael Little  
Alyssa Mazzenga

#### 1-Year Term

Steve Devine  
Dave Harnitckek  
Debbie Harding  
James Kilduff  
Alicia Sikes

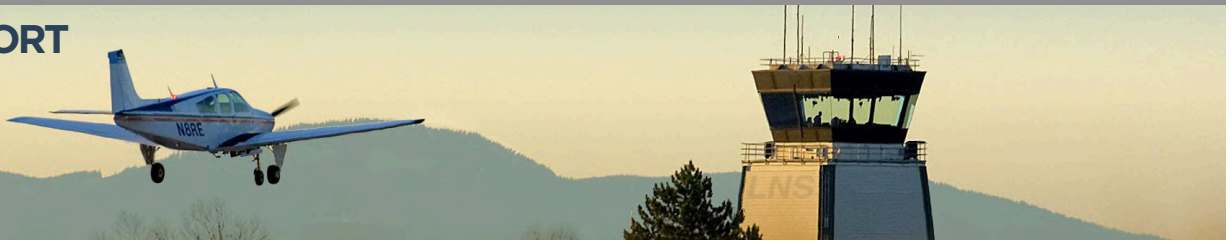


### Honorary Life Members

Roscoe Draper - Tuskegee (1919-2024)  
R. Anderson Pew - AOPA (1936-2022)

## AIRPORT REPORT

Elaine Farashian



### PHILADELPHIA INTL [PHL]

The Dept. of Aviation unveiled new branding for PHL and PNE at its 2<sup>nd</sup> annual State of the Airport in September. The refreshed logos are the airports' first since 2012. The new designs' primary colors remain blue, but secondary and tertiary colors pay homage to iconic Philadelphia locations and objects, including "Love Park Red," "Go Birds Green" and "Broad Street Line Orange." The words "Good things start here!" launch the new campaign.

Puppies were brought to the airport as part of a training program with The Seeing Eye, a nonprofit that pairs with visually impaired people. Along with their handlers, the dogs boarded a stationary jet while flight attendants looked on. The puppies settled under the seat. The airport experience is intended to acclimate the puppies to the busy environment they'll encounter later when they are paired with new companions.

Allegiant Airlines will begin nonstop service to Des Moines, Knoxville and Grand Rapids beginning May, 2026. The PHL service is among 30 new nonstop routes connecting 35 cities across the country, including four new markets.

### NORTHEAST PHILADELPHIA [PNE]

PNE has achieved level 3 Airport Carbon Accreditation (ACA), highlighting the airport's dedication to advanced environmental sustainability. ACA is an international carbon management certification program intended to encourage the airport industry to reduce its carbon footprint and improve efficiency. This voluntary program evaluates an airport's carbon emissions management and reduction strategies and recognizes its efforts through the program's accreditation levels. PNE and PHL are among only 27 airports in the US to achieve this distinction. Each year PNE must show emission reductions and complete rigorous verification through Airports Council International North America (ACI-NA) and the governing body of ACA.

### BRANDYWINE [OQN]

LED runway lighting project is operational, with pilot-controlled operation coming later. The runway widening project start date is unknown while runway 9 approach end engineering considerations are worked out with the FAA. D-row hangar rehabilitation is continuing with a new rehab company. Over 200 new bushes were planted along the UPS fence line to replace trees that were removed. The local Hertz rental car operation has partnered with the airport to make cars readily available for transient traffic.

### DOYLESTOWN [DYL]

The taxiway light replacement project is complete, with all new taxiway lights installed. PAPIs and REILs are slated for replacement pending approval of this project. Extensive pavement repair and repaving is delayed until spring. A new water line from the street to the terminal area will be installed, replacing the current well water. Funding has been received for further hangar rehab.

### FLYING W [N14]

The airport is being sold to a developer for housing. The closure date is still being discussed, but the airport is expected to remain open for another two years.

### NEW GARDEN [N57]

The winter ground school kicked off on October 28 with a 20-student class size. The airport hosted its first ever Cars, Coffee & Airplanes on October 18 and is planning future ones in 2026. On December 13<sup>th</sup>, the airport had a visit from Santa and provided photos and holiday refreshments. The 2026 Future Aviators Summer Camp dates are set for July 6-10 and August 3-7 leading to the 2026 New Garden Air Show August 8-9.

### QUAKERTOWN [UKT]

Money has been allocated and orders placed for 8 new T-hangars and 3 new larger "unit" hangars. Construction will start in the spring with completion expected in late Summer/Fall. Contracts were awarded for pavement repairs and repaving of numerous taxiway and ramp areas. Due to delay of funding, the start of these projects has been pushed back until spring. A large obstruction removal project, involving trimming and removing trees from the approach paths, will soon commence. Completion is expected before the end of winter.

### SOUTH JERSEY REGIONAL [VAY]

The airport has just completed its taxiway project. The new taxiway A was moved and the old one was demolished between taxiways D and B. Taxiway D will remain closed until phase 2 is started, hopefully in March. Phase 2 will remove existing taxiway D and join it to the new taxiway A. A new air conditioning and heating project in the FBO will start in January and run through April.

### VAN SANT [9N1]

A long-awaited hangar roof and door repairs are expected to begin soon, pending material and contractor availability.

### WINGS [LOM]

The pavement renovation for the taxiway was delayed until spring due to the federal government shutdown. Repaving will begin in 2026. A new hangar is planned for spring 2026. A new clearance delivery radio will be operational in 2026 replacing the need to call clearance delivery by phone.

### FRANKLIN INSTITUTE *(from Paul Heintz)*

The Franklin Institute in Philadelphia formally closed its Aviation Hall after 90 years. In its heyday, it was one of the most popular exhibit areas. 50 years ago, a Boeing 707 was "parked" outside on steel beams, with an entrance to the fuselage via a bridge extending from the Aviation Hall. It drew many visitors who had never been on an airliner. The Hall was the site of an annual formal Aviation Dinner, with speakers such as F. Lee Bailey, Tom Watson, Barry Goldwater and General Doolittle. They will certainly preserve the Wright Model B, but other aviation-related items, including an engineless T-33, will be scrapped. The space will be converted into flexible space for educational purposes.

## CROSSING AMERICA IN A HELICOPTER OWEN WATKINS

I lifted off from Torrance, California on August 15, 2025 in a brand-new, stock Robinson R44 Raven II with friend and fellow Aero Club member Ethan Crane. With a new-aircraft smell, straight from the factory, I didn't pick it up just to bring it home. I had a bigger plan. I wanted to chase records.

80 hours, 55 minutes, and 08 seconds later, I crossed the Verrazano Bridge in New York City, finishing a coast-to-coast flight that set three new records.

- Speed Over a Recognized Course, L.A. to New York City — 30.42mph, both World and National records.
- Transcontinental National Speed, West to East

### Why I Went for It

One of the things I enjoy most about aviation is how many different directions you can take it. You can learn new aircraft, new categories, and new classes. You can compete, or you can set records. I was in the Robinson Pilot Safety Course with Douglas Matthews, and he told me he was planning some record flights of his own.



I showed some interest, and he walked me through getting signed up with the NAA and FAI. That was the spark.

I had about two months to prepare. A few years ago, I flew a Bell 407 from the Pacific to the Atlantic, so I already knew the stretch from California to El Paso. From there, I laid out a straight line to the finish and broke it into two-hour legs. As the delivery date for the R44 got closer, I kept an eye on prognostic weather maps. Everything lined up, and I felt good about the conditions.

### The Team Behind Me

I wasn't doing this alone. Ethan is the Robinson dealer. Bruce Sagnor, a longtime friend and fellow pilot, did the logistics work. He called every airport ahead of us to confirm they had 100LL, and most of them were waiting for us when we landed.

When we hit trouble in Bentonville, Arkansas, I leaned on Philipp Steinbach from Game Aerospace and his IA mechanic, Jake Royal. They got us back in the air when it looked like we were stuck. I handled my own ATC coordination, but I'll give credit to SMO Tower for clocking my start and EWR Tower for marking my finish.

### The Challenges

There were three moments that really tested me. The first was Benson, Arizona. It was 115°F on the ramp, and we had to self-serve fuel before launching toward El Paso with scattered thunderstorms ahead. That was tough. The second was near Bentonville. About 40 miles out, the alternator quit. At that moment, I thought the whole attempt might be over. Losing time to maintenance in the middle of a record flight isn't exactly part of the plan. But it also turned into one of the most memorable parts of the trip. While we were down, Philipp took me up in the Gamebird GB1 that his team builds. Flying that...



**Ethan Crane & Owen Watkins**

“Records aren't just about numbers. They're about showing what's possible. My advice to younger pilots is simple: dream big and chase your goals”

**Owen Watkins**



.... aerobatic airplane was an incredible experience, and it gave me a boost right when I needed it most.

The third was the final push from Bentonville to New York City. It was long, it was fatiguing, and it was all mental. Hydration, protein bars, and a little adrenaline kept us going.

#### Other Highlights

Not every memorable moment had to do with the stopwatch.

On day one, flying the shoreline helicopter route west of LAX at 150 feet was exhilarating. The Pacific surf below, the skyline off to the side, and a factory-fresh R44 heading off on a record attempt — that felt special.

Crossing the Verrazano Bridge just before midnight was overwhelming. I'd had my doubts in Bentonville, and part of me thought it was senseless to keep going. But we did, and it paid off.

#### The Finish

New York City has always been special to me. My daughter lives there, and I've flown the Hudson River Corridor plenty of times. The city always looks different depending on the light, but I had never flown it at night. After crossing the finish line, I made a figure eight over the bridge to "tie a bow" on the record, then turned up the Hudson. Seeing the city lit up, the Statue of Liberty shining in the dark — that was unforgettable.

#### What It Means

When people hear I've flown a helicopter across the country, they're surprised it can even be done. These records show that with planning and persistence, piston helicopters are capable of more than most people think. The Robinson R44 is a great machine. In its class, it's hard to beat for speed, lift, and range. I dedicate this record to my father, Robert Watkins. He's mentored me for years, and while we've done countless cross-country trips in the Lear 36, our first together in a small single-engine GA aircraft was from Yakima, Washington, to Coatesville, Pennsylvania, in his Carbon Cub SS back in 2010. At 82, he's still flying his Carbon Cub and Cessna 182T.

## 2026 Aviation Scholarships

### Aero Club of Pennsylvania

The Aero Club of Pennsylvania Memorial Scholarship Fund offers awards to young men and women who reside in the greater Philadelphia, Delaware Valley area. Scholarships are available to pre- and post-solo flight students and to those seeking careers in other aviation-related fields.

Applications will be available at [www.aeroclubpa.org](http://www.aeroclubpa.org) on **February 20**, due **April 25**. Interviews take place on **May 9** and scholarships are awarded in June at Wings Field. Contact: [scholarships@aeroclubpa.org](mailto:scholarships@aeroclubpa.org)

### Eastern PA Ninety-Nines

The Eastern PA Chapter of The Ninety-Nines awards scholarships to women from age 16+ who reside, work, or attend school in the Delaware Valley or who are members of our Chapter. Request an application by **April 20** at [scholarship@epa99s.org](mailto:scholarship@epa99s.org). Completed applications and letters of recommendation are due by **April 24**.

For information about the chapter, contact Paige Scott at [info@epa99s.org](mailto:info@epa99s.org) or visit the website at [www.epa99s.org](http://www.epa99s.org)

## CHAMPAGNE AIRWAYS

GA Flying in France  
by JULIA LEVITINA



### Julia Levitina:

Julia is a multi-year recipient of Aero Club of PA scholarships. She recently completed her checkride in France, required to earn her EASA equivalency, which allows her to pilot F-registered aircraft in Europe. She took the check flight in French!

### Flying in Champagne Country

"We love to fly and we love champagne," Sophie, the Présidente, sums up her introductions to the Aéroclub Sézannais. The flying club is located at the Sézanne-St Rémy Aérodrome, LFFZ, a nearly 1 km-long uncontrolled grass strip in the heart of France's Champagne region, where the only grape in the world legally allowed to give the bubbly its official name, is cultivated. Who wouldn't be instantly hooked, provided that the two quintessentially French attractions - the cradle of aviation and the noble sparkling wine - are spaced as per appropriate bottle-to-throttle regulations?!

### Three-Aircraft Club

The fairly small local club has three airplanes: the Italian-made Tecnam, a trainer with the Rotax engine, the Archer Warrior III, outfitted in Avidyne glass, and the French-built Robin with the distinctive "cranked wing" design, specific to the DR400 series. Manufactured in Dijon, the town famed for its mustard, the 1995 aircraft has traditional steam gauges, a couple of Garmin G5s in place of vacuum-driven gyros and a primitive black and white GPS. I fall in love instantly and leave the field, POH in hand, to prepare for my first general aviation flight over France.

It's as if whoever designed the Robin DR400-160 picked and chose the elements of different aircraft they liked best: a greater dihedral angle on the outer wing compared to the inner section, design shared with Jodel aircraft; wood and cloth wings with a stick of a nod to the old-timers; the throttle and carb heat knobs from a Cessna; the mixture control and fuel pump like a Piper. Yes, you have to keep switching hands mid-flight, ...



but if the airplane is in trim, it shouldn't matter anyway! The seats of the roomy four-seater adjust beautifully and, for the very first time, I'm perched high enough to actually see over the cowling, as the light streams through the airplane's big slide-back canopy. Two sets of stubby mechanical wood and cloth flaps. Tricycle gear. 160 HP Lycoming engine. Three fuel tanks, yielding a total of 150 liters, or roughly 5 hours of flight, take 100LL or UL91 Avgas. We fill up with UL91. The less expensive fuel looks just like the pink rosé and a homemade gadget samples it conveniently into a wine bottle. Makes perfect sense, we are about to lift off over vast fields of the celebrated French vintners!



### Ceiling & Visibility OK

Local METAR reports "le CAVOK," Ceiling and Visibility OK, a common weather acronym in Europe. We punch in 7000, the French transponder code for VFR, set the elevation in hectopascals and run the checklists. Simultaneously, I get a crash course in French radio calls from Guy, the retired Air France Boeing 777 Captain and co-owner of the Club. English might be the international language of aviation, but if you want your average French barnstormer, liable to recite his life story on frequency, to be aware of your position, it helps to say it in a way he'll be sure to understand.

We taxi out onto the grass strip but forego a soft-field "wheelie." One notch of flaps, power-set, airspeed-alive, no-alarm call-outs and we rotate at 110km/hr. The airplane is smooth and light, and very responsive. At altitude, which is fortunately in feet, there are lush green vineyards punctuated by yellow rectangles of maturing wheat as far as the eye can see, with an occasional sprinkling of small towns. A couple of Swiss general aviation pilots must have appreciated the many available emergency landing spots recently, when they lost an engine and had to put it down in a field. The aircraft was towed to maintenance by the field's owner, a farmer, who just happened himself to be a pilot member of the Aéroclub Sézannais.

### Visual Flight Rules

As I get into a steep turn, I point out that the miniature airplane portion of the turn coordinator is INOP, but Guy waves his hand at it - it's all VFR! The inclinometer is there and working, good enough for stalls. I watch the airspeed bleed off counterclockwise and wait for the stall horn, poised to recover. Switch hands, carb heat off, back to cruise flight. Then carb heat on again as we descend into...

...the pattern. This here is the authentic pilotage under visual flight rules: untowered grass strips, no PAPIs, no runway markings, just lots and lots of subtle landmarks across the largely uncontrolled airspace. The pattern entry involves overflying the windsock to determine the active runway, then joining the downwind leg at TPA. First call on frequency is a simple "Bonjour," followed by the F-number. I thought it was the equivalent of the radio check, but it's simply a matter of politeness. "They might not have a radio anyway, it's all VFR!"

With farmland everywhere, it's easy to spot the airport, even for pilots in need of an instrument rating, ...

... to locate an unfamiliar runway on a perfectly sunny day. I take a minute to figure out why Guy is pointing to the left - without any hint of paint, pavement or lights, I have successfully lined up with a taxiway! I correct and glide down the well-rehearsed 3 degree glide slope, known as the 5 percent slope in France, for a touch and go, then another spin or two in the pattern. The landings are smooth despite my lack of experience with soft fields. I was worried the stick would feel awkward in my right hand but flying is so intuitive, it becomes second nature instantly.

### Time for Champagne

We say good-bye on frequency and taxi to parking. To keep the airplanes looking good, the club asks that they be cleaned after the last flight of the day: we wipe off the leading edge, the cowling, the wheel pants and the dash with a little UL91 from the wine bottle. We then replace the rags, securing them with clothespins in the corner of the hangar, strategically out of reach of prop wash.

With the sliding metal doors shut and the coveted flight portion of the day completed, it is now time to move on to the delightful second component of flying in Champagne, synonymous with the name of the region!

**Presentation:** Julia will speak about flying in France at Flying W Airport, Mon, Feb 23, 7PM

**CHAMPAGNE AIRWAYS!**  
— ELEVATING YOUR SPIRITS! —  
*GA Flying in France*

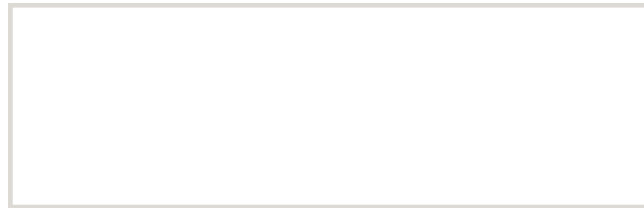


Organized December 17, 1909  
Chartered May 10, 1910  
Aero Club of Pennsylvania  
1399 Narcissa Road, Blue Bell, PA 19422



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## AVIATION CALENDAR

### Aero Club

- Feb 23 Flying in France, Flying w (N14) 7:00PM
- April 30 Board of Directors Meeting
- May 9 Scholarship interviews (KOQN)
- June 18 Annual Aero Club Scholarship Dinner
- Sep 5 Aero Club Cape May Fly-in

### Local

- March 27 Angel Flight East Gala - angelflighteast.org
- May 1-3 Heritage Field Airplane Fly-In (PTW)
- May 9 Chili Fiesta Fly-in, Massey (MD1)
- May 23-24 Harrisburg Air Show (Blue Angels)
- May 29-31 Atlantic City Air Show
- June 5-7 MAAM Reading WWII Weekend (RDG)
- June 20-21 Greenwood Lake Air Show
- June 19-21 Chester County Balloon Festival (Willowdale)
- June 13-14 Ocean City Maryland Air Show
- June 20 Antique Airplane Fly In, Massey (MD1)
- July 6-10 Future Aviator Camp, New Garden Airport
- Aug 3-7 Future Aviator Camp, New Garden Airport
- Aug 8-9 New Garden Air & Car Show
- Oct 7-9 PA Aviation Conference (Reading, PA)

### National

- April 14-19 Sun 'n Fun Fly-In; Lakeland Florida
- July 8-12 Ninety-Nines Intl Conference (San Diego)
- July 20-26 AirVenture Oshkosh
- Sept 21-27 Triple Tree Aerodrome Fly-In, Woodruff, SC
- Sept 10-13 International Seaplane Fly-In Greenville, ME
- Oct 3-11 Albuquerque Intl Balloon Fiesta

## Board of Directors Report

### Board Meeting, October 16

The Aero Club Board of Directors met on October 16, 2025 at Wings Field. Communications Chair Rob Dant presided over the meeting that included reports on finances, scholarships, membership, communications, and special events. A few board members attended via Zoom. Much of the rest of the meeting included discussion about the December Wright Brothers Dinner.

### Annual meeting, Dec 17

During our December dinner, our required annual member meeting was held to vote in five new board members for a three-year term. Members in attendances voted unanimously for the nominated members. The meeting took just five minutes.

### Board Meeting, January 15

The Aero Club Board of Directors met on January 15, 2026 at the Philadelphia Aviation Country Club at Wings Field. The meeting started out with the new board voting in officers for 2026, including President Michael Dunleavy and Vice President Steven Devine. The meeting proceeded as usual.