

VAA HALL OF FAME



JIM KOEPNICK

2005 INDUCTEE

RICHARD W. KNUTSON

BY H.G. FRAUTSCHY

Like a lot of young people, Richard “Doc” Knutson was fascinated with aviation and started building model airplanes at a young age. He was born in Cuba City, Wisconsin, in 1924, and, as a child, jumped at any opportunity to get to an airport to see the real thing. After World War II came the schooling needed to make a living as a chiropractor, but as soon as his professional and family life with his wife, Grace, allowed, he learned to fly. The city of Lodi, where he lived, had no airport, so he took flying lessons in Baraboo, Wisconsin, starting in June 1953. Lloyd Bell instructed Doc in a Cessna 140.

With his private pilot certificate in hand, he bought his first airplane,

an Aeronca 11AC Scout. Next came a Stinson 108-2, a straight tail Cessna 172, and on up through the popular airplanes of the 1950s and '60s. A couple of sons came along as well, Dan and Paul.

Years of building model airplanes had created an interest in restoring the real thing. The first project was a J-3 Cub he located at the now closed Rainbow Airport in Franklin, Wisconsin. It was 1967, and although the fabric was weak, the Cub was ferriable. The purchase price was \$500.

Doc had a two-story garage behind his office in Lodi where he worked on the J-3, and he was able to sneak out between patients and get things done during office hours. Since it was

his first project, Doc’s enthusiasm was high. He had the aircraft flying again in only five months, although there were times he would have to peel fabric cement off his hands before taking care of the next patient! Satisfied with his results, he started restoring an Aeronca 7AC Champ next, and he never stopped after that. Over the years, Doc and his son Dan have restored 22 airplanes.

Even at age 81 he remains active and can be found in the hangar, turning wrenches, mixing butyrate dope, or doing whatever else needs to be done. In addition to nearly two-dozen aircraft restorations, Doc has restored about a dozen antique automobiles and built countless model airplanes.



Doc (far right) and a pair of other Lodi, Wisconsin, pilots started the Lodi Lakeland airport in 1956. It remains in operation today, a pretty grass field nestled in the softly rolling hills just northeast of town. Doc has used the local airport to give rides to as many local folks as he could over the years. Long before the days of the Young Eagles program, Doc made sure every youth within three counties got an airplane ride. He was an active member of the Civil Air Patrol until the squadron was disbanded. In addition, he was an Air Scout Leader.

Right: A dapper young Richard Knutson.



Below: Collage of airplane photos. Many of the airplanes Doc has restored. For most of the restoration projects, his son Dan assisted him. Doc has been a judge for Contemporary aircraft at EAA AirVenture, since the category was established in 1993, and a judge at the Annual Sentimental Journey at the former Piper factory in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania.



If it flew, he was interested. These are just a pair of the many radio-controlled model airplanes Doc Knutson built.



Another fabric-covered Piper is attended to by the local Lodi, Wisconsin, chiropractor, Doc Knutson. Known around the world within the Cub Club as one of the experts on the restoration of fabric-covered Pipers, Doc still takes time to answer the occasional letter or phone call asking him for restoration advice.



Piper PA-11



Piper PA-12 Super Cruiser

Piper Comanche



Piper Tri-Pacer and Piper Pacer



Aeronca 7AC Champ



1937 Dodge Truck & the Piper J-3



Stinson 108