

QB PINEHURST HANGAR (SOP) – OBITUARY – DONN EVANS MCGINNIS QB #38673

Pinehurst, NC (SOP)
Dick Harpster, Key Man
July 19, 2021

Our beloved hangar member, Donn Evans McGinnis, 89, passed away Saturday, July 3, 2021, in his Pinehurst home, surrounded by his wife, Sara, his children, and his stepson.

Donn was born July 12, 1931, in Massillon, Ohio, to Roger and Carolyn McGinnis. He graduated from high school in Danville, Ill., (1949) and had just begun his undergraduate studies when the Korean War broke out in 1950. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy and was assigned to the Naval Aviation Division as a flight engineer on a PBY sea plane flying search and rescue missions out of Kodiak and Point Barrow, Alaska. This experience led to a lifetime love of aviation and a yearning to return to Alaska someday.

After his service in Alaska, Donn returned to southern California, where in 1953, he began flying as a civilian and achieved his private pilot's license in a two-seater Aeronca Champ. Upon completion of his commitment to the Navy, he returned to his parents' home in Illinois, and restarted his undergraduate studies at Northern Illinois University, where he received his bachelor's degree in business administration in 1954. Post-graduation, Mr. McGinnis started his business career at General Electric.

Donn became interested in the FBI and filed his application with the agency, however before hearing from the FBI, Boeing Aircraft offered and he accepted a position in Seattle, Washington, in 1962. He moved his young family to Bellevue, Washington, and began work at Boeing when in 1963 his application with the FBI was accepted, and within weeks he was to report to the FBI training facility just outside Washington, D.C. He accepted and began his 22-year career with the FBI. Assignments as a special agent included Dallas-Fort Worth, Newark-Patterson, N.J., and eventually Quantico, Va., where he taught firearms and special weapons and tactics (SWAT) to new FBI recruits as well as seasoned police officers who were selected to attend the National Police Academy training provided by the FBI.

Throughout his career with the FBI, his passion for flying never waned and in 1967, Mr. McGinnis purchased a Cessna 172 (N8462X) from his uncles who had bought the plane new in 1962. He shared his love of aviation with his son Donnie at an early age, and together they could be found "bumming around" local airports on most Saturdays. Some of his favorite hangouts were Lincoln Park (N07) in New Jersey and Shannon Airport (EZF) in Fredericksburg, Va. Donn flew his family on numerous daylong and weekend trips to the beach at Ocean City (26N), N.J., to a family friend's farm in northern Pennsylvania, and back to his boyhood home in Massillon, Ohio (CAK), just to name a few of his favorite destinations. At the time of his passing, he still owned "62X" and kept it hangared at Moore County Airport (SOP) in Southern Pines, North Carolina.

In 1986, McGinnis reached the FBI's mandatory retirement age of 55 while living in Columbia, S.C. He received his FAA flight instructors rating and began providing flying lessons out of Columbia's Downtown airport (KCUB – Jim Hamilton - LB Owens). He also began teaching firearms training to the Richland County Sheriff's Department, who quickly realized his abilities and needed a "new" pilot for their surveillance aircraft. Donn was deputized in Richland County and along with another deputy, flew surveillance mainly on narcotics-related suspects. One deputy would fly the plane while the other manned the gyroscopic binoculars. It was not long before the team realized each other's strengths and often, Deputy McGinnis

was the pilot in command, while his partner manned the binoculars and radioed the suspect's location to the deputies on the ground.

Donn retired from the Richland County Sheriff's department in 1996 and moved to Pinehurst, where he could relax and play golf. However, he never lost his desire to return to Alaska and in 1999, he did just that. He applied to be a pilot for Skagway Air Service and began to spend summers in Skagway, Alaska, flying passengers traveling to and from Alaska and air tours over Glacier Bay. He made supply runs to remote towns reachable only by air and flew passengers needing medical service not available in Skagway. Flying in Alaska's weather and over its remote, rough terrain is unforgiving and not only requires professional flying skills, but seasoned judgment to stay out of trouble. When flying over the glaciers with his daughter, he pointed out various rock piles, each with a name, that the pilots used to navigate over this remote terrain.

It was on one of his regularly scheduled passenger service flights from Skagway to Juneau that Mr. McGinnis met his wife, Sara Barnes McGinnis, who was working for Holland America Cruise Lines as a land tour guide when the ships docked in Skagway. This chance meeting was the start of a 21-year loving relationship and a 20-year marriage between two people meant for each other. They shared a love of Alaska, family, friends, wildlife and traveling to the annual McGinnis Family Reunion every October. Even after Donn stopped flying for Skagway Air Service, he and Sara returned to Skagway from their Pinehurst home to visit friends and enjoy the mystic environment that is Alaska. They even spent a winter there living in an apartment over the local hardware store.

Donn was presented with the Wright Brothers "Master Pilot" Award by the FAA on June 6, 2006, at a ceremony at the Southern Pines / Moore County Airport (KSOP). The FAA's most prestigious award recognizes individuals who have exhibited professionalism, skill and aviation expertise for at least 50 years while piloting aircraft.

Don applied to the Raleigh-Durham Hangar (RDU) on June 8, 2009. He held Commercial ASEL & S, Inst & CFI-A ratings, and had 8979 hours. He would Demit from RDU, to become a Charter Member of the Pinehurst (SOP) Hangar on February 1, 2015.

Donn McGinnis flew his last flight in 62X on April 20, 2020. It was a typical flight around the Pinehurst area just long enough to "burn out the cobwebs" and to make a soft landing back at SOP-Moore County Airport. He never stopped loving to fly and to "bum around the airport" with his many "Airport Bum" friends.

Our hangar postponed a planned outing on July 17th to attend a memorial service organized by Donn's family at the Moore County / Southern Pines / Pinehurst Airport (KSOP). Nearly the entire hangar's membership turned out to honor their brother Gone West, returning the love that his wife mentioned he often expressed for his fellow QB brothers. A missing man flight was expertly planned and executed by our Governor Jim Murray (Glastar), Key Man Dick Harpster (Velocity) and member Larry Gebler (Cardinal).

Donn McGinnis' remains will be interred next to his parents at Sunset Hills Burial Park in Canton, Ohio, on October 23rd of this year during the annual family reunion he loved so dearly. At a later date, the family will take some of his ashes to be scattered over Alaska, "The Great Land" that he adored.

Our hangar received condolences from a number of other hangars, including this one from Jim Hamilton, QB 13561, CAE Hangar: "Donn was a great guy, a very good friend and a flight instructor for my FBO at KCUB".

See you again out West one day, brother Donn.

[BEAM EDITORS – SEE ACCOMPANYING IMAGE QB_SOP_DONN_MCGINNIS]