

WORLD

SUMMER 2021

AIRSHOWNEWS

***Airshows
Are
Back!***



THE REBIRTH OF THE SOUTHEAST COUNCIL OF AIR SHOWS...

A Phoenix Rising



The International Council of Air Shows (ICAS) is the official trade organization for the North American airshow business and is dedicated to building and sustaining a vibrant airshow industry. There are also four individual regional councils of airshows that provide a way for airshow producers, performers, and support service providers in a region to discuss issues of common interest and to share ideas. Instead of 1,500 or more attendees at the national ICAS Convention, the regional meetings tend to attract less than 150 people, offering a more intimate environment and regionally focused programs. In concert with ICAS, the regional councils support airshow safety and facilitate sustainment of the industry.

For almost 24 years, there were only three regional organizations – the Northeast Council of Air Shows, the Northwest Council of Air Shows, and the Southwest Council of Air Shows. Notably missing was the Southeast Council of Air Shows, which had ceased operations in the mid-1990s after airshow producers in the region lost interest in participating. Without the producers' participation, the organization simply became a group of performers trying to sell their services, but with no one to sell those services to.

THE NEW SECAS IS BORN

In late 2018, Rob "Francis" Carlson was retiring from twenty years in the U.S. Marine Corps where he had served for a time as the Marine Corps liaison to the ICAS Board of Directors. Rob wanted to find a way to stay involved with the airshow industry, but when ICAS President John Cudahy suggested that Rob might want to investigate bringing the Southeast Council of Air Shows (SECAS) back to life, his first reaction was, "What is a regional

council?" After Cudahy explained the role of the regionals and the void that existed in the southeast, Rob immediately saw the opportunity. "OK. Let's do it," he said.

The rebirth of SECAS began with Rob hosting a kickoff meeting at the ICAS Convention in Las Vegas in December 2018. That meeting also became the first step in recruiting a founding Board of Directors. Greg Gibson of SUN 'n FUN became President, Pete Hovanec of the Warbirds Over Monroe Air Show became Vice President, and Carlson became Secretary/Treasurer. The other founding board members were performer Greg Koontz, Bob Yanacsek of FROST, Moreno Aguiari of the CAF D-Day Squadron, and Mike Spalding of the Military Aviation Museum. Once the new board was in place, bylaws were drafted, and SECAS was incorporated as a nonprofit 501(c)(6) organization, with pro bono legal assistance from Curtis McNeil of Catalyst Creative Consulting.

The regional councils generally hold annual conferences early each year prior to the start of the spring airshow season. The Board targeted early 2020 for the first SECAS membership conference, but a lot of work still needed to be done. "We needed to let people know we existed, build a website, get our first conference planned, advertise it, and sell tickets," explains Carlson.

After a follow-up session at ICAS 2019, the inaugural "SECAS Education and Resource Summit" took place February 21-23, 2020, at Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Marietta, Georgia, just north of Atlanta. Almost 100 airshow producers, performers, and support service providers participated in that first meeting.

That first SECAS Summit would, however, become the last professional airshow meeting to be held in person anywhere for over a year. The COVID-19 pandemic soon grounded almost all

airshows, as well as most other in person group gatherings.

Once the pandemic began to wane, the 2021 SECAS Summit would, ironically, become the very first such gathering to return, taking place March 19-21 at the Richard B. Russell Regional Airport in Rome, Georgia. The meeting was a huge success, with an enthusiastic group of around 80 airshow professionals in attendance. Three of the founding board members – Aguiari, Yanacsek, and Spalding – also completed their terms and were replaced by Natasha Avey of Wings Over Houston, George Cline of Airboss Inc., and R.T. Dickson of Swamp Fox P-51.

“The area that SECAS occupies geographically is the largest of the ICAS regions in the United States, and it also has one of the highest concentrations of airshows per capita in the country,” says SECAS President Greg Gibson. “Having a regional in this section of the country is absolutely critical because we are also geographically the farthest away from the ICAS Convention. Some members might not be able to go to ICAS from a logistics and expense standpoint, so having our content in support of ICAS’s mission is an important niche that we can fill.”

SECAS also plans to work hard to grow the number of venues for airshows and aviation events in the region (which stretches from Texas to Virginia), including engaging with southeastern airport managers to explain the benefits and logistics of hosting an aviation event. Later this fall, for example, SECAS will present an education session at the Louisiana Airport Managers and Associates (LAMA) conference in Baton Rouge. “I’m passionate about getting airports in the southeast that are not having aviation events on board with having events,” explains Gibson. “That will be a very big part of our mission.”

“We preached from the beginning that we want SECAS to innovate, be member-driven, and be more than just a meeting

every year,” adds Carlson. “After the most recent annual meeting, we now have members joining committees to help plan a youth engagement program, a scholarship fund that will invest in the future of our industry, and the next Summit.”

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Anyone who has been around the airshow industry for a while knows that, to remain relevant, the industry needs to recruit more young people into the business. To address this opportunity, SECAS is planning to partner with three airshows – Wings Over Houston, the Future Pilots of America Fly-In and Air Show, and Warbirds Over Monroe – to pilot a program to expose high school students to the inside workings of an airshow.

“The students may already be involved in aviation programs at school, but that’s probably leading them to be commercial pilots or commercial mechanics,” explains Carlson. “The airshow industry is its own little niche, so we need to help students who are already interested in aviation to see what our part of aviation has to offer them.”

The participating airshows will identify several stations or locations for the students to experience. The opportunities may differ between shows, but examples include attending the performers briefing, spending time on the airboss stand, one-on-one time with performers, helping a parachute team pack their chutes, time with the emergency services team, and perhaps helping line crew fuel or marshal aircraft. Rob says he would also love to have students work with the airshow announcer to make pre-scripted announcements over the airshow sound system, giving the announcer the opportunity to explain the program to the crowd, potentially generating interest for future participants.

Carlson says he sees these first three events as something of a

Opposite page: SECAS President Greg Gibson speaks to 2021 Summit attendees as other board members look on. From left to right are George Cline, Greg Koontz, Gibson, Pete Hovanec, Natasha Avey, and Rob Carlson. Board member R.T. Dickson was not present (photo by Jim Froneberger).

Right: Airshow announcer Danny “Hollywood” Clisham announces a Summit drawing winner as SECAS Secretary/Treasurer Rob Carlson looks on (photo by Ricardo von Puttkammer).

Below: John Cowman (left) of JLC Airshow Management chats with SECAS President Greg Gibson (right, photo by Ricardo von Puttkammer).



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Below: Several SECAS members staffed exhibit booths at the 2021 Summit. This is Bob Yanacek (left) and Joe Sarber (right) of FROST (photo by Ricardo von Puttkammer). **Right:** The 2021 SECAS Summit in Rome, Georgia included several education sessions, including this one with airboss George Cline (right) and performers Buck Roetman (left) and Scott "Scooter" Yoak (center) discussing the importance of proper aircraft maintenance (photo by Jim Froneberger). **Bottom right:** Aerobatic pilot Melvin Williams (left) and event organizer Trey Geboy (right) are both examples of up-and-coming airshow professionals that SECAS hopes to cultivate to grow the airshow industry in the southeast (photo by Jim Froneberger).



proof of concept and based on feedback from the various participants and stakeholders, the program can evolve as it grows and matures. "Right now, we think the right number of students per show is three or four, because I know I can keep three or four fully engaged," explains Rob. "We'll update the program for the second year with the idea that it can grow to include additional shows, and more students."

"Airshows and aviation events are how many people are first attracted to aviation, but they are also an aviation career path that doesn't currently have any sort of developmental pathway," explains Gibson. "This behind-the-scenes opportunity for students is something that can get more people awakened to the idea that they can not only become passionate about aviation and aerospace careers, but that career could be the same thing that got them excited."

SECAS SCHOLARSHIPS

The SECAS board has set aside \$2,000 for a scholarship program, and Vice President Pete Hovanec is leading a subcommittee charged with finalizing the program details and how the scholarships will be awarded. The program will benefit SECAS members and assist in growing the organization, but the number of scholarships to be awarded and the amount of each is still being ironed out. Either performers or airshow organizers could be scholarship recipients.

SECAS hopes that the scholarship program can help attract new members like two young people who attended the 2021 Summit in Rome. Trey Geboy is a 20-year-old college student from Middle Georgia State University who started an online community for aspiring pilots called Future Pilots of America (FPA). He also organizes and runs the annual FPA fly-in and airshow at Roosevelt Memorial Airport in Warm Springs, Georgia. Melvin Williams is a 33-year-old aspiring aerobatic pilot who owns a Decathlon and is based at a suburban Atlanta airport. He is just getting started in aerobatic competition in the IAC Primary category and

hopes to one day fly airshows.

"We are all about advancing the industry and doing what we can to help not only those already in the industry, but also creating new opportunities for people looking to break into the airshow business," says Hovanec. "We want to help sustain our industry, and our scholarship program will help provide access to education opportunities and the expertise SECAS members have to offer."

FUTURE SECAS SUMMITS

A third member subcommittee, led by board member Natasha Avey, is focused on determining locations and dates for future SECAS Summits. The group is most immediately focused on 2022, but they hope to quickly pivot to the 2023 event so that it can be announced at the 2022 Summit.

"Our first two Summits were both in the Atlanta area – Marietta and Rome – but from the beginning we said we ideally wanted to rotate locations," says Carlson. "If you alternate locations, you can be convenient for people in different parts of our region in different years."

While Summit attendance will continue to include SECAS membership, going forward, a new membership option will be available for those who cannot attend the Summit, but who still want to be a part of SECAS.

"What I like about all of our different initiatives is they each feed the other with opportunity," concludes Gibson. "Our work to engage with airport managers can help create more diverse event venues, which in turn gives us a broader palette of locations for our youth engagement and more candidates for our charitable committee choose from. There is some real synergy to what we are doing here to try to grow the airshow business in the southeast."

