

Saluting Captain Bob!



The WordchipperSM

by Larry Gauper • #301

Wordchipper@Gmail.com
Blog: www.Wordchipper.com

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I've lived in Fargo for the better part of a half-century, but I'm still making exciting discoveries in the Red River Valley. My latest eye-opener happens to be the *Casselton Robert Miller Regional Airport* and Captain "Bob" Miller himself. I say "captain" because between 1963 and 2000 he flew for the US Air Force, North Central Airlines, Republic Airlines, and Northwest, logging thousands of hours in the left front seat in a variety of large jet aircraft.

But Bob has never been close to really being "retired" since that day he parked the Northwest Boeing 757 airliner he was flying—for the final time—at the Minneapolis airport. He was 60 then, the mandatory retirement age for airline pilots, an age limit that's not only disliked by many pilots, but I don't like it either, because, as a passenger, I'm losing all that experience up front. Experience, to me, means increased safety.

So, how did Capt. Bob and I get together for one of my best mornings and lunches so far this summer? Well, a neighbor, Tom Askland, knows I'm always interested in talking about aviation. Actually, Tom knows I like *talking* about anything (and talking and talking), but I've always had a special interest in trains and *planes*. That's why he suggested we drive out to the area just south of I-94 at the Casselton interchange and meet Capt. Bob, a friend he became acquainted with during their mutual involvement in the Fargo Air Museum. So, one beautiful June morning a couple of weeks ago, we did just that.

Wow! Was I impressed by the spread I found—a setup that would have flapped the wings of Sky King and his daughter Penny (for those of you remember those flying radio and TV characters from way back). This well-kept and, on some days, very busy regional general aviation airport has 20 hangars holding 75 business and personal aircraft. Bob manages the airport and has done so since the day he worked hard for its establishment.

Airplane owners rent hangar space to keep their airplanes out of our North Dakota weather. And the "headquarters" building is Bob's place, a large hangar-type workshop and showroom that houses the Captain's "trophy planes," along with plenty of space to practice his hobby of building prize-winning airplanes from kits. I marveled at an exact replica of the *Messerschmitt*, a non-flying model of the classic German fighter plane.

BUT THE OTHER SHIP YOU CAN'T MISS, AMONG SEVERAL, IS THE CAPTAIN'S CENTERPIECE:

Dakota Boy, and can this baby fly! It's a fast moving acrobatic type plane that took Bob about five years to build. In 2007, he flew it to the internationally famous *AirVenture Air Show* in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Once there, you're among some of the best aviators in the world. At this particular gathering he and his plane won the coveted "Lindy Award," named after aviation pioneer and Minnesotan, Charles Lindbergh. To serious flyers, a "Lindy" is something like an Oscar or Grammy: it represents the first place "champion" honor in the kit-built category.

IN 2007, BOB WAS INDUCTED INTO THE NORTH DAKOTA AVIATION HALL OF FAME and, on March 8th of this year, the Federal Aviation Administration presented him with the *Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award* for "50 years of Dedicated Service in Aviation Safety." All those years without an accident—now *that's* the kind of pilot I want flying the airplane I'm in!

Bob was born and grew-up in Casselton and he and his family made their home there while he accomplished over 40,000 hours of flying time. He and Janice, his wife of 49 years, raised two sons. Actually, with dad away so much, Bob says Janice did most of the "raising." Son Scott is currently a Delta Captain on the MD-88 and MD-90 and Dain is a civil engineer in Fargo.

CURRENTLY CHAIRMAN OF THE NORTH DAKOTA AERONAUTICS COMMISSION, Bob is still adding to the significant financial contribution aviation makes to the North Dakota economy. He's now working with the University of North Dakota's Aerospace Center to help make it possible for the military to test those new, remote-controlled drones somewhere in the North Dakota skies. Bob also does volunteer work with youth interested in aviation, through the area chapter of the Experimental Aircraft Association and its Young Eagles Program.

Bob Miller is not done building and flying airplanes. Most any day, if you want to find him, head on out to the airport that's named in his honor. In this state, we're proud to call him one of our own. He's done much more than I've mentioned here for aviation in North Dakota and we can all be thankful he's still doing it!