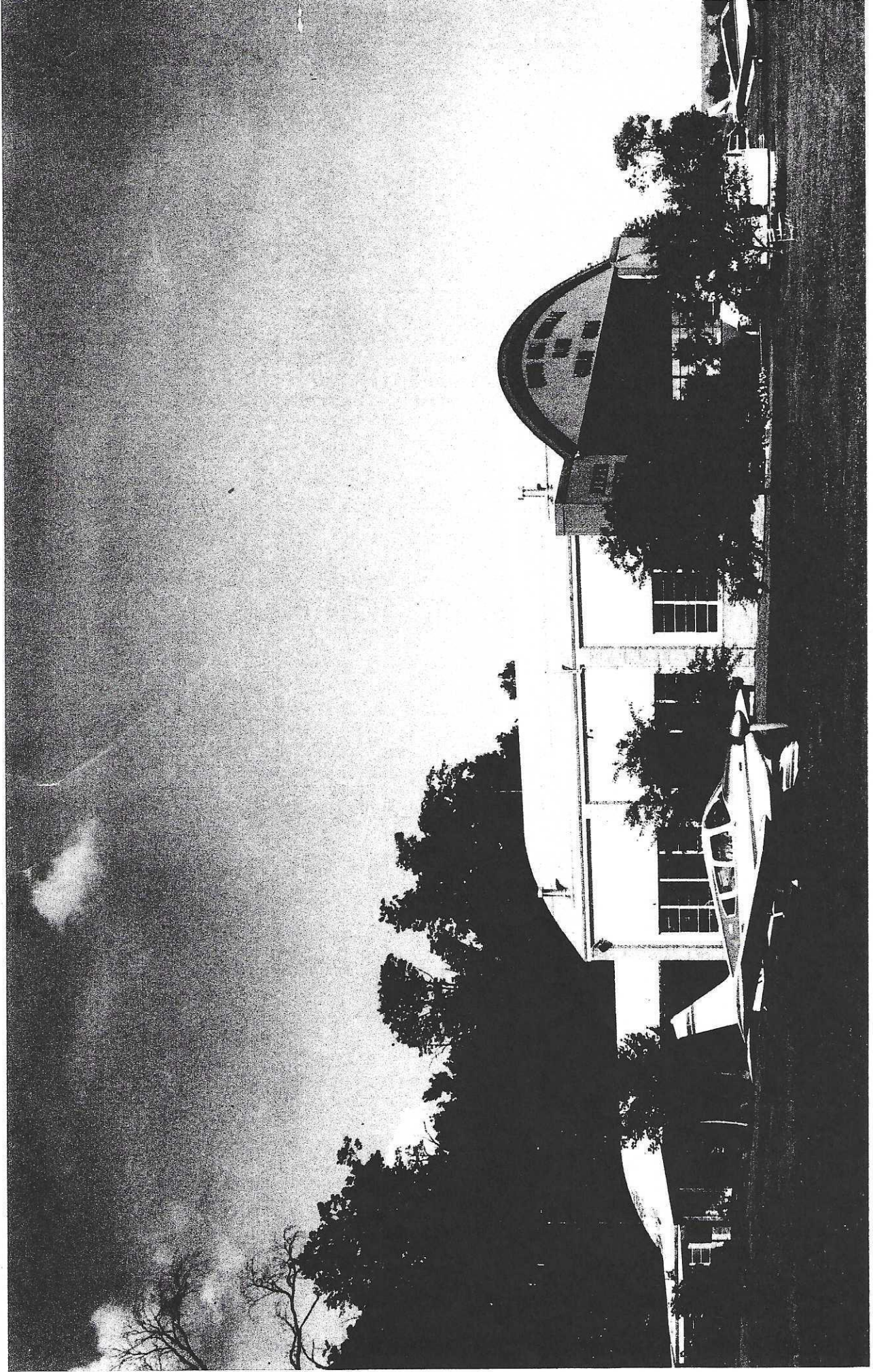


# FAA AVIATION NEWS

APRIL 1971



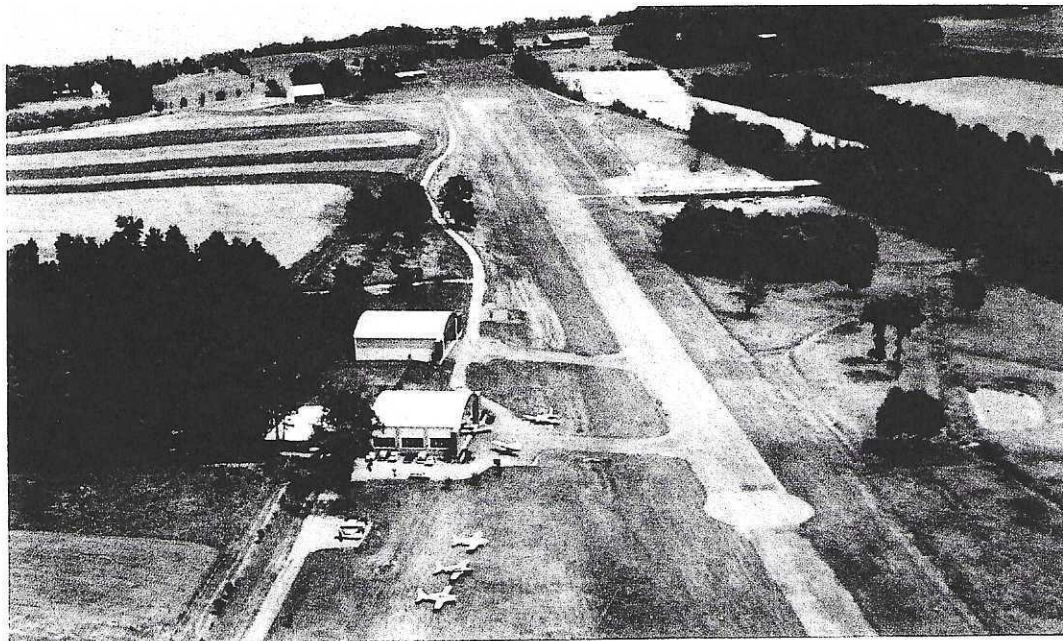


The snow cover all around the little upstate New York airport measures over 10 inches, but the runway has been freshly graded and UNICOM invites you in. Before you have completed your landing roll, airport attendants are beckoning you toward one of the two spacious hangars. They show your aircraft inside the hangar before you have had a chance to open your door, so that you step out on a dry surface, in case you forgot to bring the rubber overboots everyone wears here in the winter. You are escorted to the pilot's lounge, and while you are busy shuffling your papers and checking your schedule, someone closes out your flight plan for you by phone. You notice with some amazement the modern decor that delights the eye—worn, weathered pine paneling, the acoustic tile ceiling, the shining glasswork, the counters with real—not wax—greens, the comfortable chairs and the abundance of flight materials on hand at the counter. You begin to wonder whether you have blundered into some kind of private pilot's hangar, and you brace yourself as you approach the manager's office, just in case you happen to be wearing a saffron robe and goatskin sandals.

But here you are disappointed. Jim Messenger, manager of the little Skaneateles airport, wears a plain business suit and represents, not the Dalai Lama, but Empire Aero Services, Inc. The red carpet treatment accorded transient pilots, as well as the local pride, is his idea of how to make friends out of pilots. So is the golf course-like appearance of the airport, with its delicate ponds, flowers and ornamental trees (not aligned with the runway, of course) which has led to Empire Aero's gaining the first FAA Airport Beautification Award ever given to a privately owned airport. In an era when many all private airports are having a hard time making ends meet, Empire Aero has found a winning formula for survival by paraphrasing Keats: "A thing of beauty is a joy to fly into."

Actually, it is probably the excellent reputation Empire Aero has acquired for repair services that is most responsible for the sound economic status of the airport, which has an FAA approved repair station rating as well as radio communications, navigation, and pulse ratings. Empire Aero Services, Inc., which owns the airport, is also a general distributor, but the shop repairs all manner of light aircraft, and the service department helps sustain the company when sales slack off.

Empire Aero had its beginnings back in 1947, when contractor A. S. Wikstrom, head of a large construction company, had a 300-foot east-west sod strip graded on a hill overlooking Skaneateles Lake, a few miles south of the town. Wikstrom operated on the strip in a Navy SNJ Advance trainer used in his business. Over the next



## the Skaneateles Story

*How a wide spot in the meadow grew into the aeronautical showplace of the Finger Lakes country.*

few years he had a small 60' by 60' hangar built and acquired other aircraft, including a D17S Staggerwing Beechcraft.

In 1956 the runway was lengthened to 3,200 feet and partially paved; a 3,400-foot north-south sod runway was added, and the hangar was enlarged. But the airfield was limited to private use until 1961, when Wikstrom formed Empire Aero Services as a separate entity and opened the field to the public. Concerned with problems of getting what he considered adequate maintenance on his little fleet of aircraft, Wikstrom decided that one way of making sure that he had access to a first class repair station was to establish his own. By 1964 Empire Airport, with two large hangars (total floor space: over 160,000 sq. ft.) and two runways, was serving the needs of pilots for miles around.

At the suggestion of Wikstrom's energetic airport manager, James Messenger, a Piper distributorship was acquired at this time, and Empire was soon in the business of selling aircraft and supplying eight Northeastern dealers with airplanes and parts. By 1970, when Empire Airport received its FAA Beautification Award, the little airport was widely known and appreciated. Over 1,500 persons turned out on June 21, the day of the award ceremony, to help celebrate Federal recognition of Wikstrom's and Messenger's efforts to combine beauty

and convenience with public service.

In presenting the award, FAA noted that Empire was living proof that an airport could be a good neighbor and a credit to the community aesthetically as well as economically.

A far cry from the dust and grime and ramshackle construction of early day airports, Empire is as attractive as a lake-side country club. As a temporary or permanent base for business aircraft operating in New York's Finger Lakes District, it has many appealing advantages over larger airports. There is a sense of courtesy and consideration displayed by Empire's employees that is reassuring. There is also a sense of dedication to the needs of business flying. The heavy winter snows, which can easily total 150 inches of snow in this area, do not provide an excuse for shutting down the airport. When his own tractors or trucks are not enough to keep the runways usable, Messenger hires additional equipment. It is expensive, he admits, but it is also very expensive to keep a corporate plane locked in when the company has important business elsewhere.

Empire believes in being a full-service airport. Flight instruction, ground instruction, and charter service are given the same careful attention as aircraft sales and maintenance. These departments may not bring any great income to the airport, Messenger



admits, but that is no reason in his view to slight them. You never know when a student pilot or a traveling salesman may turn into an airplane purchaser, and if you have impressed him with the thoroughness of one of your services, he is likely to be favorably disposed toward your sales office.

Professional men—doctors, dentists, lawyers, engineers, etc.—form an important segment of the airplane buying public at Empire. Many of them live near Skaneateles by choice, because of the beauty of the countryside, even though they may work in Syracuse (about 30 miles north) and they like to buy or base an aircraft near their home rather than near their work.

Even the local residents who have never flown in a small plane are aware of Empire Airport—not merely because of the FAA Airport Beautification Award, which is a great source of local pride, but also because of the active role the airport's management has taken in community fund-raising activities. The Rotary Club's annual fly-in breakfast in June is a typical example.

But apart from special events like this, it is the day-to-day thoughtful and dedicated conduct of all the people at Empire Airport—the gardener, the mechanic, the radio specialist, the pilots, the salesmen, the management—that makes the airport a good neighbor to the town and a mecca for all kinds of pilots. It is not Shangri-la, but it bears an unmistakable resemblance.

Lewis Gelfan

The FAA Airport Beautification Award Program is intended to enhance the public image of the local airport as an attractive gateway to the community. Any airport in the United States open to public use may apply for the FAA award, on the basis of having carried out a program for improving the appearance of the buildings or grounds in one of four particular areas:

*Landscaping projects*, which include removal of litter; screening of trash, scrap or other unsightly areas; planting of grass, flowers, shrubs and trees.

*Pavement and Fencing*, designed to make parking zones, access roads, and visitor areas more attractive, and to protect against injury from engine run-up.

*Construction*, which includes the restoration of old airport buildings in poor condition as well as new building and decor; also the elimination of hazards to aircraft, such as electric wires, and to personnel, such as unprotected ramp areas.

*Miscellaneous projects*, such as creation of special exhibit centers for vintage aircraft, civic-oriented projects involving the community, youth education projects, etc.

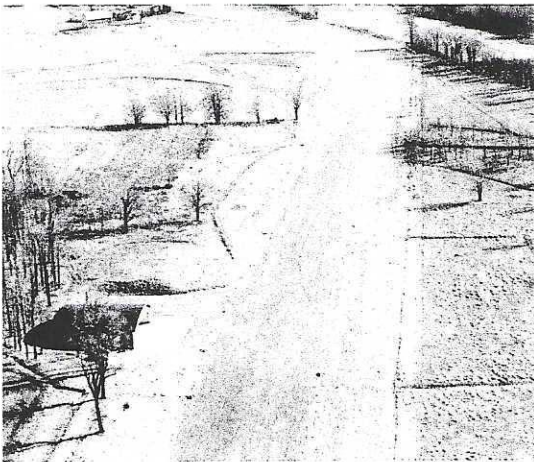
Sources of Federal, state and local financial assistance for beautification projects are listed in two pamphlets: "Federal Assistance in Outdoor Recreation" (35 cents), and "Directory of Private Organizations

Providing Assistance in Outdoor Recreation to Individuals, Organizations and P Groups," (30 cents). Both may be ordered from the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 20402.

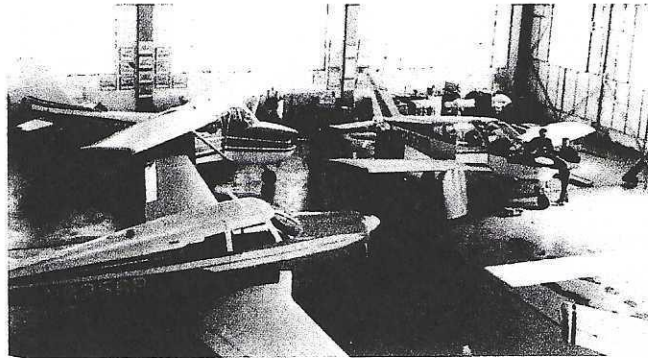
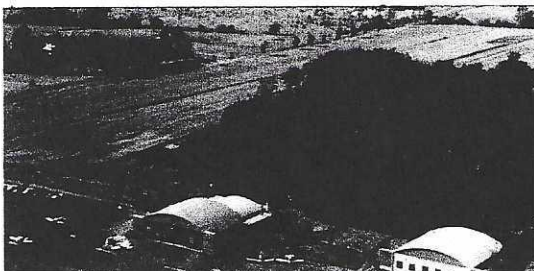
An airport may be nominated for award by its management or by any interested individual or group. A nomination consists of:

1. A statement identifying the airport, its location, age, type (commercial or general aviation or both), name and address of owner and operator. Also, a detailed description of the beautification accomplishments (within the previous 12 months), the degree of community participation.
2. Appropriate color or black and white photographs—preferably contrasting "before" and "after" situations.
3. A proposed citation, 100 words or less summarizing the major accomplishments.
4. Supporting evidence, such as correspondence, published articles, etc., if available.

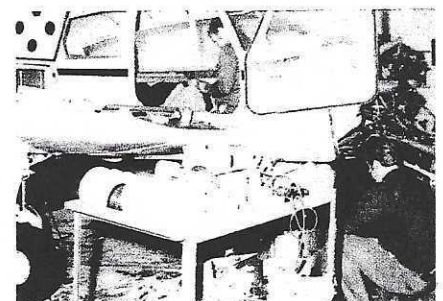
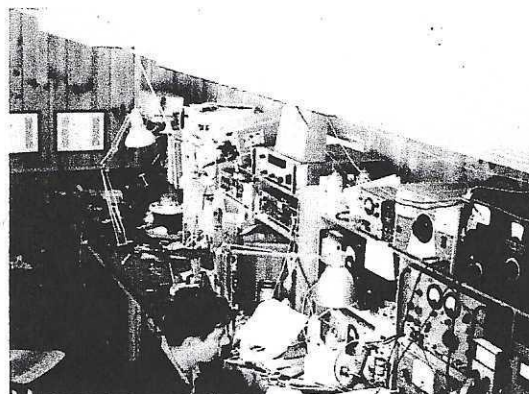
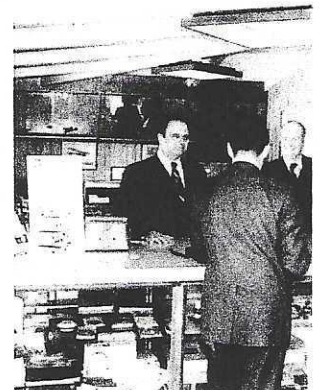
Nominations should be sent to the Director of Public Affairs, DOT/FAA, 800 Independence Avenue, S. W., Washington, D. C. 20590. Airports which appear to qualify will be visited by a regional official, and upon his recommendation the Administrator may approve the award.



Empire Aero began in 1956 as a sod strip, later added a hangar. Today it has two runways (one 3,600 footer paved), two hangars, a distributorship, and an excellent reputation for maintenance. About 25 aircraft are based on the airport.



The spacious, well lighted and heated repair hangar handles all kinds of general aviation aircraft. Behind the well-supplied flight counter (right) are Jim Messenger, airport manager, and Charles Dalton, sales manager.



The radio repair shop (left) at Empire Aero supplies and maintains avionic equipment. Complete engine overhauls are carried out (above) as well as airframe maintenance.