

Illinois Aviation Hall of Fame Honoree Candidate Data Form

I. Personal Information

Name: Thomas E. Lowe **Nickname:** Tom

Current Address: 823 Kingston Lane
 Crystal Lake, Illinois 60014

Telephone: 815-459-6873 **E-mail Address:** stearman@mc.net

Date of Birth: April 6, 1941

Period of Illinois Residence: Dates: 1967 to Present
Cities: Crystal Lake

II. Statement as to How Candidate's Achievements Have Contributed to the Advancement of Aviation in Illinois:

Primary Employment Activities:

Lowe was hired by United Airlines in 1967. He flew for United for 33½ years, retiring in May 2001 as B-747-400 Captain with no incidents or accidents. His entire career was flown based at O'Hare Field, Chicago, Illinois. He flew the Douglas DC-6, Boeing 737, B-757, B-767, Douglas DC-10 and Boeing 747-400.

While flying as a Second Officer (Flight Engineer) for United Airlines, Lowe also flew part-time as a corporate pilot for Miller Manufacturing Co., Chicago, Illinois, until the company closed its aviation department.

In 1975, Lowe became a founding partner of Northern Illinois Air Charter, a FAR Part 135 air taxi-charter business operated from Dacy Airport, Harvard, Illinois. He operated this business for several years until it was sold.

After retiring from United Airlines, Lowe became a part-time charter pilot for Emery Air Charter, a FAR Part 135 operation, in Rockford, Illinois. He flew for Emery for two years until the company closed its charter department.

Pilot Qualifications:

Airline Transport Pilot:

Ratings: Airplane multi-engine land
B-737, B-757, B-767, DC-10, B747-400.
Commercial privileges: Airplane single-engine land
Glider

Flight Instructor (Gold Seal):

Ratings: Airplane single and multi-engine
Instrument airplane
Glider

Ground Instructor:

Ratings: Advanced Ground Instructor
Instrument Ground Instructor

Flight Engineer:

Ratings: Reciprocating Engine Powered
Turbojet Powered

Flight Experience as of September 2008:

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Pilot | 21,635 hours |
| Flight Engineer | 5,721 hours |
| Total | 27,356 hours |

Flight Instructor 2,990 hours

Lowe has flown 126 separate types of airplanes, ranging from a 37-horsepower Aeronca C-3 to a Boeing 747. He has flown 98 individual Stearman biplanes.

Aviation Activities Beyond Employment:

National Stearman Fly-In: Lowe's most significant contribution to aviation in Illinois is the National Stearman Fly-In, which is held each year in Galesburg, Illinois. Lowe and his friend Jim Leahy (now deceased) of Galesburg cofounded the Fly-In in 1972. What was planned as a one-time gathering was so successful that it became an annual event, and it has continued uninterrupted. The Fly-In will mark its 38th anniversary in September 2009.

The first Fly-In attracted 19 airplanes, and now regularly draws 120 to 140 Stearmans each year from throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. The Fly-In has become an internationally-known event, and has made Galesburg synonymous with Stearman aircraft to Stearman enthusiasts around the world. The National Stearman Fly-In is a major annual event in Galesburg and, as such, is a significant financial contributor to the economies of Galesburg and surrounding communities.

During the Fly-In's first 10 years, Lowe and Leahy organized, advertised, conducted and financed the event themselves with the assistance of a small group of enthusiasts in Galesburg. During its first decade, the Fly-In was financed in part with the proceeds from a public air show held on the weekend. When there was a financial shortfall – every year – Lowe and Leahy personally covered the deficit.

After 10 years, the Fly-In was incorporated as a non-profit organization and a Board of Directors was elected to conduct the event. Lowe has served on the board since its inception as a Director and also variously as Executive Vice President and Vice President. He has declined to serve as President, believing that position should be held by a Galesburg resident. For many years during Fly-In week, Lowe was Director of Flight Operations and was responsible for all flight activities.

Lowe served for many years as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Stearman Foundation, parent organization of the Fly-In. The Foundation, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, is engaged in planning a Stearman Museum to be located in Galesburg.

Stearman Restorers Association: In 1972, Lowe assumed the presidency of the Stearman Restorers Association (SRA), an organization which served as the Stearman Type Club for both the Experimental Aircraft Association and the Antique Aircraft Association.

The SRA, with 40 to 50 members when Lowe became President, was almost defunct. During the 20 years he was SRA President, from 1972 to 1992, membership grew to more than 1,500 throughout the United States and in other countries, including Canada, Mexico, England, Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Japan, The Philippines and Singapore.

During Lowe's presidency, the SRA served to coordinate and encourage Stearman enthusiasts, and participated in Fly-In activities such as the EAA at Oshkosh, Wisconsin; the AAA Fly-In at Blakesburg, Iowa, the National Stearman Fly-In at Galesburg, Illinois, and other regional AAA and Stearman fly-ins. While serving as SRA President, Lowe published its quarterly magazine, the "Outfit," and contributed much of the material it contained. He remains a member of SRA and contributes articles on Stearman history and flying techniques on a regular basis to its magazine, which has been renamed "The Flying Wire."

Antique Airplane Association: Lowe is a life-time member of the Antique Airplane Association (AAA). In the early 1970s, he was appointed to serve as AAA's Illinois State Director, replacing E.E. "Buck" Hilbert, an Illinois Aviation Hall of Fame inductee. Lowe served in this capacity for several years, coordinating AAA activities in Illinois with the national organization. He also was appointed to serve as a Director of the AAA Airpower Museum at Antique Airfield, Blakesburg, Iowa.

In the mid-1970s, Lowe was appointed one of four National Directors of the AAA and continues in that position, coordinating and advising the operation of the National AAA organization throughout the United States.

From the mid-1970s through the 1980s, Lowe was the founder and first President of the Dacy Chapter of the AAA, based at Dacy Airport, Harvard, Illinois. During the 10 years the Dacy Chapter was active, he was instrumental in organizing and conducting the Dacy AAA Fly-In and Airshow, which grew from a 1-day event to a 3-day function and saw as many as 150 antique and classic airplanes participate. During the 10-year period, he served several times as President of the Dacy AAA Chapter.

Flight Instructor Activities: During his airline career, and since retiring, Lowe has been a very active general aviation pilot. He also has been a part-time, freelance flight instructor at many Chicago-area airports. Over the years, Lowe has become a specialist in flight instruction in tail-wheel airplanes, especially antique and classic airplanes and warbirds. He is one of the most-experienced and well-known instructors in Stearman biplanes in the United States. He also is well-known as an instructor in the North American AT-6 "Texan," giving dual for aircraft checkouts, basic aerobatics, and formation flying through the FAST organization. At the time of this nomination, he is still actively engaged in flight instruction in Stearmans, AT-6s and other tail-wheel airplanes.

Aircraft Restorations: Lowe owns two Stearman biplanes which he and his wife, Nancy, restored -- one of them twice. His 1931 Stearman C3R "Business Speedster" underwent a 6-year restoration. In 1985 it was selected as the Grand Champion at the National AAA Fly-In. It has received numerous awards at other

fly-ins since that time. Lowe's other Stearman, a 1942 N2S-3, has been re-built twice in the 35 years he has owned it. It also has received several awards over the years.

Author Experience: Lowe has authored numerous articles on aviation history, technical information and flying techniques which have been published in many magazines such as the EAA, AAA and SRA newsletters and the American Aviation Historical Society Journal. In 1977 his article, "The Flying Aces Air Circus," was selected by the American Aviation Historical Society to receive both of its awards -- The Contributors Award and The Willis L. Nye Award -- as the best article published by the AAHS in 1977.

III. Recognition and Awards Received:

Lloyd Stearman Memorial Award, presented by the Stearman Restorers Association.

Air Force Commendation Medal

The Contributors Award and The Willis L. Nye Award, presented by the American Aviation Historical Society.

IV. Other Information or Comments:

Early Life, Education: Tom Lowe was born in Knoxville, Iowa, in 1941, the son of Richard and Bernice Lowe.

He lived in Centerville, Iowa, most of his early life. He was graduated from Centerville High School in 1959. He was a member of the National Honor Society, and was selected twice as an Iowa All-State musician (French horn).

He was graduated from Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, in 1963 with a Bachelor of Science degree in History and minors in Government and Military Air Science.

Military Service: Iowa State University's Air Force ROTC program designated Lowe as a Distinguished Military Graduate, which made him eligible to receive a regular commission in the United States Air Force.

Lowe served four years as an Air Intelligence Officer and served in South Vietnam in combat operations with the 481st Tactical Fighter Squadron in 1965. He flew 11 combat missions in North American F-100Fs and Cessna O-1E/Fs as an Intelligence observer. He served with the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing at Korat Air Base, Thailand, in 1966. He was involved with F-105 combat operations over North Vietnam. He received the Air Force Commendation Medal for service with the 388th TFW. Lowe was separated from the Air Force 1967 with the rank of Captain.

