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National Association of State Aviation Officials: Air Youth of America

Ernest Gamache

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AIR YOUTH OF AMERICA

By Ernest Gamache,*

The contemplated program for AIR YOUTH OF AMERICA has recently been announced. Many of you doubtless heard Lowell Thomas, Dr. Luther Gulick, Jackie Cochran, and Winthrop Rockefeller explain what we propose to do and may therefore be somewhat familiar with program details. Your president has asked if I might elaborate and indicate how members of your association could assist in spreading the effectiveness of our proposed service.

Before getting into that, a thumbnail background on why we ventured into this activity might be helpful in explaining current developments.

Last fall—just about a year ago—Winthrop Rockefeller, having had his interest aroused by Frank Hawks in the leisure-time possibilities of a program in junior aviation, called together a small group to discuss what might be done to further Frank's ideas. All agreed that before anything was undertaken, we should first determine what was now being done, who was doing it, and what forms their interest took. A survey was thus undertaken.

For over a year, we have gathered and analyzed reports and program materials from all sections of the country. We have found not only what Capt. Hawks claimed was true, but that it went much further. Youth not only has an intense interest in aviation, but is extremely active. In many sections, this has developed into a valued form of group activity. This is not news to you.

Our estimate of participation is that over 2,000,000 boys and girls are active in some phase of junior aviation. You gentlemen know all too well what they are doing in your state and doubtless in many others. They are not, as a rule, shrinking violets, and do not hesitate to make their wishes known.

Let me, rather than dwell on that phase, take but a moment to indicate what is lacking and as a result, we believe, holding progress back.

We find, in most sections, a hit-or-miss development which has grown without thought or plan, attracts large numbers of youth, but suffers the loss of probably a larger number by reason of their inability to obtain needed mature guidance and assistance. The activity for the most part is local, is sporadic, and little has been done to pull it together. In few states has there been any attempt on the part of schools to cultivate this intense interest and guide it into constructive educational channels.

The average boy or girl, more eager, more receptive than an older person, finds in aviation a source of glamour and fascination probably unmatched by any other interest today in its intensity. Young people want to know more about flyers and flying and the reasons why planes fly. They look to their elders—their teachers and parents to tell them.

They bring their eagerness into the schoolroom, but all too often they are stopped right there. There just isn't any information about aerodynamics and flying in the textbooks or in the classroom. Too often will the teacher lead them away from the subject, for the youth are getting to know more about

* Executive Director, Air Youth of America, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City.

aviation than their teachers. I feel sure most of you have observed or heard about such situations.

I could continue to tell you many other of our survey findings, but as my time is short and we plan to review in detail all phases of the survey in our current publications—copies of which will be sent you—let me proceed to an explanation of the program.

We believe that the most effective way youth can learn about aviation, especially as to its fundamentals, is by becoming immersed in it. One phase of the immersion is in the building and flying of models. Another, in the study of text material presented in a way the youthful mind can grasp. Another, and probably the most important, competent guidance by informed leadership.

Our program guidance service will be directed to the leader, to the teacher, to the one in charge of a youth group. We feel that if the leaders are properly cultivated and supplied with carefully planned program materials, the needs will be more adequately met than if our approach were to the individual boy or girl. Teachers and students, club leaders and participants will welcome, we believe, an authoritative source of information.

How do we propose to accomplish this? In several ways, all of which add up to a rounded service of leader guidance. A clearing house for authentic information is sorely needed—a source to which leader or group, teacher or parent, sponsor or contemplate sponsor, can turn for assistance. A monthly bulletin is being developed for wide circulation among interested groups to answer this need. It will be a clearing house for advance information and present the leading thought on subjects of current interest.

Then, a series of booklets and handbooks, again directed to group leaders and serving to guide them along the path of group activity. Such pieces as:

- How to form and run a club
- How to build model aircraft
- How to develop and run a contest, etc.

are now contemplated. From time to time, institutional booklets will be prepared on aeronautic subjects in which youth is interested, such as meteorology, navigation, radio, engines. Our aim is to orient youth in the science of flight.

Now as to model building and flying. It is a valuable leisure-time activity in which youth, if properly guided, derive a wealth of benefits—all of which may be summed up in what educators like to call "character building." Here we feel what youth needs is directional assistance. He has the interest and enthusiasm to accomplish. He needs to be guided.

What usually happens when a boy first becomes interested in models? He will go to a store, either alone or with his fond parent, and will be sold by a salesman who knows little about model building, a kit far too expensive and complicated for him to build. After the boy has tried his level best to put it together, he turns to his father, uncles or friends for aid. Finally, after hours of discouraging effort, he gives up in despair, convinced that model building is too difficult and not for him. Aviation has lost a potential supporter.

Our approach is to make a graded series of four or five kits available through established dealers—and to educate the beginner to start with kit No. 1 and work up progressively. By the time he has completed the series, he will be ready to build from plans which will be supplied to groups, again on a progressive basis.

One of the current needs which must be met, if today's educational conditions are to be improved, is the training of new leaders. Boys who are now our

expert builders will be able to assist considerably. But leaders who are already established in youth organizations and schools should have a background of aeronautic fundamentals to effectively meet the demands placed on them by our air-minded youth. It is our plan to develop training institutes through which training will be given to interested potential leaders.

Other educational activity will be developed as the program expands and more participation results. We have in mind the development of a weekly radio program, the production of educational movies, the working into our primary and secondary school texts more aeronautic factual material. The conveyor use of aviation in our established school courses is great, but little advantage is being taken of it today. Mathematics, science, physics, history and geography could be made the more interesting. A service of vocational guidance will prove most helpful, we feel, to guide youth in the possibilities of employment. These and other phases will be developed as needs arise.

Our plan to make these services available when ready has been developed. They will be offered first to established youth organizations now working through recognized leaders. Such groups as Boy Scouts, Y. M. C. A.'s., Boys' Clubs, Park & Recreation Depts., Junior Chambers of Commerce and many others, are examples. The program will be made to work smoothly with these groups before the second step is taken—that of introducing it to secondary schools. It is our aim here to have aviation clubs formed in all schools interested, under the guidance of teachers who can develop the program. This phase is so large, as those of you who have dipped into it know, that we are not anxious to get too deeply into it at the start.

As a third stage, we plan to form and service new groups who will become affiliated with Air Youth. Such groups will have adult sponsorship and leadership. They will follow the pattern of presently established model clubs and will be very active in contest participation.

For all these services, nominal fees will be charged. It is the aim of our Committee to make the work eventually self-supporting.

The part which members of your association can play in the development of this program can and should be a large one. You are in a strategic position to stimulate and assist in making this youth activity more widespread. In established youth groups, in schools and in new groups, your on-the-spot counsel and advice can be an important factor for success. Many of our high schools now offer aviation courses, either on a vocational or industrial arts basis. Every city in which such courses are given should have an Advisory Board made up of experienced lay and technical men. They should take on the responsibility of seeing that a sound program is developed in the light of current conditions in the field. You could exert a strong practical influence on this Board to influence public school training.

Those of you who have assisted schools in your state know they welcome suggestions and desire assistance. They need help in getting used equipment—airplanes, engines, instruments—and they would like to look to you for a helping hand from time to time, even though their activity may be strictly avocational.

If assistance is desired in the vocational field, you should keep certain facts in mind. We all know that high standards exist in the industry. Boys who hope to get jobs must have real skill as well as desirable personality and character traits. They should be chosen carefully and the unfit weeded out. Aviation classes should not be a dumping ground for dull boys who have nothing more to offer than an interest in aviation. Such boys have nothing but disappointment ahead, so far as getting into aviation is concerned.

The aim of courses in high school should not be solely to train boys for aviation. They should be encouraged to think of aviation as a leisure-time activity, one in which they might participate by later belonging to a flying club or assisting in airport development. Our high schools should act as feeders to flying clubs. Youth who are air-minded in school are likely to carry their interest into later life.

Before encouraging schools to develop vocational courses, local conditions should be carefully studied. Courses should be adapted to fit these conditions. It would be pointless, for instance, to encourage courses in mechanics in Augusta, Maine, whereas in Buffalo, Baltimore, Patterson, Hartford, and Southern California, it would be equally pointless not to do so. We must recognize the limitations of aviation as well as its opportunities.

A National Council, the governing body for Air Youth, is now being formed under the temporary chairmanship of Winthrop Rockefeller. Such persons as Sanford Bates, Thomas Beck, Col. Henry Breckinridge, Jacqueline Cochran, Bill Enyart, Lester Gardner, Dr. George Lewis, Carl Norcross, Dr. John Studebaker, Lowell Thomas, Edward Warner, Dr. James West and others, have agreed to serve. Others will be added to represent all interests in the field.

Air Youth expects to have its program service ready by December 1st. We shall keep you currently informed of progress through frequent mailing and shall welcome your suggestions. We want to work closely with you and need your help in making our youth more soundly air-minded.