



Montgomery Flight – 1904



Moffett Field – 1933



China Clipper – 1936



Hiller XH-44 – 1944



NASA Ames Research Center – 1981

# Northern Wings

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The Aero Club of Northern California  
www.aeroclubnorcal.org

Summer-Fall 2009

## Mike Melvill to receive 2009 Crystal Eagle

### *SpaceShipOne Pilot 1st Commercial Astronaut*



Mike Melvill, SpaceShipOne -- Scaled Composites Photo

Test pilot Mike Melvill, who flew SpaceShipOne into space five years ago to become the first commercial astronaut, will be the 2009 recipient of the Crystal Eagle, awarded by the Aero Club of Northern California to honor those whose achievements are among the highest in aviation.

The award will be presented during the Aero Club's annual Crystal Eagle Dinner on Saturday, Oct. 24, at the Hiller Aircraft Museum in San Carlos.

Melvill will become the 27th recipient of the Eagle, which was first awarded in 1983 to legendary aviator James "Jimmy" Doolittle. Over the years, recipients have included such aviation luminaries as Chuck Yeager, Bill Lear, Jeana Yeager, Scott Crossfield, Elgen Long, Sean D. Tucker and Steve Fossett.

Melvill made history on June 21, 2004 as the first pilot of SpaceShipOne, which was built by Burt Rutan's

*(Continued on Page 3)*

## *Aero Club members tour test pilot's vineyard*

Members of the Aero Club of Northern California enjoyed a different type of activity this summer with a wine-tasting tour of the Cooper-Garrod Vineyards in the hills of Saratoga.

The family winery is operated by George Cooper, retired engineering test pilot for NASA who was the Aero Club's 1990 Crystal Eagle recipient.

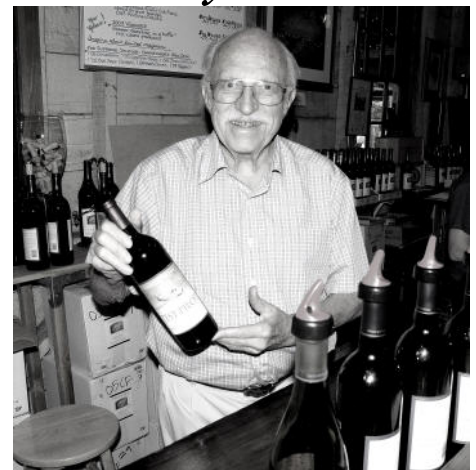
Club members toured the vineyards and processing facilities at the winery and tried a variety of wines in an historic tasting room,

the "Fruit House," which features a display of Cooper's test pilot career and the 145 types of aircraft he flew over the years.

Winemaker emeritus Cooper himself staffed the bar to pour samples of the different varieties produced at the winery and to share stories with fellow Aero Club members.

Cooper, a World War II P-47 pilot, retired in 1973 after 28 years as a distinguished research test pilot at NASA Ames Research Center.

*(Continued on Page 4)*



*Northern Wings Photo*  
George Cooper – Winemaker Emeritus



-- Special to Northern Wings

**Rick Willson and his Fly Baby homebuilt – after 2,000 hours of work**

### *Board of Directors Profile*

## After 10 years of work, Rick Willson is ready to test-fly homebuilt Fly Baby

Ten years. Two-thousand hours of labor.

And now Rick Willson's little homebuilt Bowers Fly Baby is ready to take to the skies. So is Willson after a long hiatus from the pilot's seat.

For the past decade, building the tiny, mostly wooden monoplane with fabric covering has been a major project for Willson, past president of the Aero Club of Northern California and a current member of the board of directors.

The single-seat, open-cockpit aircraft is in a hangar at South County Airport in San Martin as Willson prepares to get current again so he can fly it.

Willson, a retired senior manager with Intel, started flying light airplanes when he was 15 years old at an airport that no longer exists in Lodi. He paid for lessons with money earned on his newspaper route. Then he learned that being color-blind would prevent him from getting a pilot's license.

Later, as a student at San Jose State

University, he discovered that he could fly with a restriction – no night flights. So he was back in the air.

Then came marriage and children, so Willson and his wife, Leah, agreed to put aviation on hold until the kids were grown and married.

Now that they are empty nesters, Willson is returning to the skies.

He chose the Fly Baby to construct because it is very similar to a model airplane he built when he was 8 years old, a model he still has.

"So it's just a big model airplane," Willson said.

The Fly Baby is made mostly of wood with fabric covering. It is just under 19 feet long, with a 28-foot wingspan. It weighs just 605 pounds empty and can cruise at 100 mph with its 65-horsepower Continental engine.

The hardest part of the project was finding a place to paint it. Airports don't allow painting in individual hangars any more, so Willson folded up the wings and trucked the plane to a horse barn in Sunol where it took three weeks to paint.

## NTSB:

### Downdraft caused 2007 Fossett crash in Sierra Nevada

Aviator and adventurer Steve Fossett -- the first person to fly solo, nonstop around the world in both a hot-air balloon and an airplane -- flew into a severe downdraft on the east side of the Sierra Nevada causing his fatal crash two years ago, the National Transportation Safety Board has ruled.

Fossett, the 2007 recipient of the Aero Club's Crystal Eagle award, disappeared on Sept. 3, 2007, but his remains and aircraft were not found on a mountainside for more than a year.

Investigators determined that Fossett had run into a downdraft exceeding 300 feet per minute at an altitude so high that the aircraft, a Bellanca 8KCAB-180 Super Decathalon, could climb only about 300 feet per minute. Fossett had made a 180-degree turn in the mountains shortly before the crash, the NTSB said in its July 10 report.

Investigators said they could not find evidence in the wreckage that suggested something was wrong with the plane before the impact.

#### **Aero Club of Northern California 2009 Board of Directors**

**Carl Honaker** – president  
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**Eric Peterson** – treasurer  
**Ray Hutchings** – secretary  
**Rick Willson** – past president  
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**Frank Sweeney** – director  
 and newsletter editor

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# SpaceShipOne astronaut to receive Crystal Eagle

(Continued from Page 1)

Scaled Composites LLC. His sub-orbital flight was the first privately funded mission to reach space. He was the 435th person to go into space.

Melvill also flew the next mission of SpaceShipOne – the first competitive flight in the Ansari X Prize competition for the first non-government organization to send a reusable manned spacecraft into space twice within two weeks.

The SpaceShipOne project won the \$10 million prize awarded by the X Prize Foundation.

In 25 years as a test pilot, Melvill logged 7,600 hours as the pilot of more than 130 types of aircraft. He made the first flights in 10 of the Burt Rutan-designed aircraft.

Born in South Africa in 1940, Melvill came to the United States in 1967 and became a U.S. citizen in 1975.

Melvill met Burt Rutan, who was the 1989 Crystal Eagle honoree, after he had built a Rutan VariViggen in his home, beginning a long association with the legendary aircraft designer.

Melvill retired in October 2007 as vice president and general manager of Scaled Composites.

In 1997, Melvill flew around the world with Dick Rutan in a Long EZ



Mike Melvill in SpaceShipOne cockpit

-- Scaled Composites Photo

aircraft that he built himself. He is the sole or joint holder of nine FAI aviation world records.

Melvill is a fellow in the Society of Experimental Test Pilots. He received the society's Iven C. Kincheloe Award in 1999 for his high-altitude test flights of Scaled Composite's Model 281 Proteus.

Five years later, he was honored with a second Kincheloe Award for his work on SpaceShipOne.

Melville and his wife, Sally, have two sons and four grandchildren.

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## Crystal Eagle Dinner

**Date:** Saturday, October 24, 2009

**Reception:** 6:30 p.m.

**Dinner:** 7:30 p.m.

**Location:** Hiller Aviation Museum, 601 Skyway Road at San Carlos Airport.

**Cost:** \$60 for Aero Club members, \$75 for non-members, including museum admission.

**Reservations:** (408) 646-7139

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## Crystal Eagle recipients over the past 27 years

1983 – James “Jimmy” Doolittle  
 1984 – Charles E. “Chuck” Yeager  
 1985 – Stanley Hiller Jr.  
 1986 – William “Bill” Lear  
 1987 – James M. “Jim” Nissen  
 1988 – Anthony W. “Tony” LeVier  
 1989 – Elbert “Burt” L. Rutan  
 1990 – George S. Cooper  
 1991 – Allen E. Paulson  
 1992 – Jeana Yeager  
 1993 – Robert T. Jones  
 1994 – Frank L. Christensen  
 1995 – James S. Ricklefs

1996 – Darryl G. Greenamyer  
 1997 – Robert L. “Hoot” Gibson  
 1998 – Donald D. Engen  
 1999 – Paul H. Poberezny  
 2000 – Wayne Handley  
 2001 – Igor I. Sikorsky  
 2002 – A. Scott Crossfield  
 2003 – Clay Lacy  
 2004 – Elgen Long  
 2005 – Eileen Collins  
 2006 – Sean D. Tucker  
 2007 – Steve Fossett  
 2008 – Phil Boyer  
 2009 – Mike Melvill

## Sweeney elected chair of SJC Commission

Aero Club director Frank Sweeney has been elected chair of the Mineta San Jose International Airport Commission, which advises the City Council and airport staff on aviation policy issues.

Sweeney, who also is editor of Northern Wings, is serving his third year on the commission. The airport is in the final stages of a \$1.3 billion upgrade and expansion of its airline passenger terminals and parking garage.

## Aero Club tour – wine tasting, aviation lore

(Continued from Page 1)

His research project on human resource management in the cockpit achieved international attention and gained national funding to deal with human factor problems among airline flight crews.

After retirement, Cooper helped develop NASA's Aviation Safety and Human Factors Research Program.

The Garrod Family acquired the vineyard property in 1893 and for decades operated apricot and prune orchards.

In 1972, the family began to replace the aging orchards with grape vineyards that thrive in the Saratoga microclimate.



--Northern Wings Photo

**Winemaker Bill Cooper explains to Aero Club members how the grapes are harvested at the Cooper-Garrod vineyard.**

## A big setback in fight to save Moffett's Hangar One

The community campaign to save Moffett Field's Hangar One got a setback in September when the Navy announced the award of a \$22.3 million contract to a London-based engineering firm to remove the contaminated siding from the historic structure.

There are no plans to replace the siding, leaving the huge hangar frame a skeleton exposed to the elements.

The contract with AMEC Earth &

Environmental calls for the hangar's interior to be cleaned out, and a weather-resistant coating be applied to the steel frame.

No date has been set for the removal yet as the Navy and NASA Ames Research Center continue their debate in Washington over which of them is responsible for replacing the PCB-contaminated siding.

The Navy is responsible for cleaning up the toxins, but it contends NASA

should pay for new siding. The space agency, which now owns Hangar One, says it has no money to do so.

The Navy said it faced a deadline to award the contract to secure federal money authorized for the project.

Navy officials contend that a coating put on the hangar in 2003 to contain the toxins is near the end of its usefulness. However, the Moffett Field Restoration Advisory Board says tests show the coating works.

## The Aero Club of Northern California

**2500 Cunningham Avenue  
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(408) 929-1060**

Chartered in 1981 as a chapter of the  
National Aeronautic Association



-- To keep the public informed of the importance of aviation and space flight to the nation's economic progress, its security, and to international understanding.  
-- To support a vigorous aviation and space education program for students at all levels of learning.  
-- To recognize and honor those who make outstanding contributions to the advancement of aviation and space flight.