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# CLASSICS SWARM BLAKESBURG

## ANTIQUAIRPLANE ASSOCIATION TWEAKS EVENT, PULLS OFF ANNUAL FLY-IN

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By Kollin Stagnito

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**Brent Taylor, president of the Antique Airplane Association, for months assured members its annual fly-in at Antique Airfield in Blakesburg, Iowa, during Labor Day weekend could safely take place. But, would anyone attend?**

Approaching the airport just before sunset in our 1947 Cessna 140, my son and I had our answer: A dozen antique and classic airplanes swarmed the sky in a loosely organized effort to enter to the pattern to land, or fly a low pass down the runway, or simply loiter over the airport to soak up the last rays of the sun. Making the arrival even more interesting, no radios are used at Antique Airfield; all operations are strictly see-and-avoid. After spotting a gap in the traffic we entered downwind and were amazed to see a packed airfield awaiting us.

Final approach to the south took us between a thick stand of trees toward the sharply rising approach end of the 2,350-foot grass runway. Our aim point was the white chalk line drawn across the runway, because there the ground becomes more level. We confirmed the flagger standing next to the white line was waiving a green flag (green means land, red signals a go-around—remember no radios) and we had arrived. Back in time. It could have been 1970 (the year Antique Airfield was established), or pre-pandemic 2019.

"I didn't know last Sunday who or how many were going to show up; it was a total unknown this year," said Taylor after the event. "I'm quite happy with the number of airplanes. And, the variety is better than expected—a lot of round engine airplanes." The fly-in normally attracts 300 to 350 airplanes and this year about 280 flew in (the final count is still being confirmed). Taylor estimates between 1,200 and 1,300 attendees. "Probably 17 percent of preregistered aircraft and people were new, including more young people than before—which is great to see," said Taylor.

The Antique Airplane Association/Air Power Museum Invitational Fly-in is a private event open only to members of the AAA and their guests, and is held on private property that receives no federal, state, or local funding. AAA made operational changes to the 2020 event according to state recommendations to minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19, such as installing plastic shields in the 24th Fighter Squadron Mess Hall, moving the Pilots Pub outdoors, providing hand sanitizer and hand-washing stations, increasing frequency of bathroom cleaning, and assembling an on-site COVID-19 abatement team. "Everything went smoother than we were ready for, COVID-wise," said Taylor.

Fortunately, the fly-in has always been an outdoor event. Attendees are encouraged to fly their airplanes during the day, and those not flying typically sit next to the grass runway to enjoy the unique sights and sounds of antique and classic airplanes dating from the late 1920s to the early 1950s.

Greg Herrick (second from right) is presented the FAA Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award by AOPA President Mark Baker (left) and Antique Airplane Association President Brent Taylor (far right). Also pictured is Suzanne Herrick, Greg's wife. Photo courtesy of Brent Blue.

Evening entertainment consists of period-themed aviation movies projected on an outdoor screen. Friday night's screening was *Tora! Tora! Tora!* On Saturday evening Taylor and AOPA President Mark Baker presented a very surprised Ottumwa, Iowa, native Greg Herrick with an FAA Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award, as Herrick's wife Suzanne looked on. "It's hard to keep a secret from Greg," said a clearly delighted Taylor. The award is presented by the FAA for 50 years of safe flying.

Friends and new acquaintances talked tailwheel airplanes and flying adventures late into the night on this idyllic airport nestled in the cornfields, beanfields, and pastures southwest of Ottumwa. "There is a pent-up demand for people to get out and spend some money. To go someplace where they can forget about all the bull\*\*\*\* in the world," said Taylor. And for a lucky few on this Labor Day weekend, that place was back in time to Antique Airfield.



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