

SKYLINES



Newsletter of the Skyline Soaring Club for February 2026

KEITH HILTON

As Keith prepares to move away, we would like to dedicate this issue of Skylines to him. We are publishing a few contributions from fellow members.



Generosity and calm under pressure

David Naoshy

"I cannot recall how many times Keith has stepped in to help with issues involving my glider or glider trailer, but one experience in particular captures the essence of his dedication and generosity.

After spending considerable time assembling my glider, the main landing gear unexpectedly collapsed just as I began pushing it down the trailer ramp. At that moment, I was unsure how to proceed. Disassembly was not possible on my own, and no one else was available to help.

Although Keith had mentioned earlier that he was only briefly at the field and had another commitment, he immediately set aside his own plans. He calmly assessed the situation, determined exactly what was needed, and coordinated access to a hoist so the glider could be safely lifted and the gear lowered. Thanks to his efforts, the problem was resolved and I was able to fly that day—even though Keith was unable to complete what he had planned to do himself.

This experience is only one example of the many ways Keith has made a meaningful difference to our club.

**Winner of the SSA Certificate of Appreciation
Jim Garrison, SSA Vice Chair**

Note: In 2021, Jim Garrison, then SSA Director for Region 4, nominated Keith for the SSA Certificate of Appreciation. Keith won the award. Below, we publish the nomination letter submitted by Jim Garrison.

Keith is originally from Wisconsin and has been with the Air Force for over 41 years.

He joined Skyline Soaring in June 2012, earned his Private Pilot-Glider rating in 2013, purchased a LS-3 and flies it for the pure joy of soaring. He has been a core member of the club ever since joining, having served on the Club's board for a couple of terms and is currently the Club's secretary. Skyline's president, Stephania Zilora, describes him as an invaluable asset.

Some specific reasons why Keith is an excellent candidate for a SSA Certificate of Appreciation are outlined below.

- Keith is almost always the first member at the field on his duty days and gets everything ready before others arrive. Many members comment that unless one gets to the airport awfully early in the morning, Keith will have the ground vehicles out of the hanger, batteries placed in all the training aircraft, and a preflight check done on every club aircraft.
- Keith has been crucial to keeping Skyline's gliders flying for many years. He takes care of all routine maintenance for the gliders and has created how-to documents so that others have good directions on how to change tires and perform other maintenance items which pilots can perform. He is constantly available by phone for a maintenance consult if he's not at the field. He also spends a lot of time helping the club's AI to keep maintenance costs low.
- Skyline has over 90 members and with a club this large, it is essential to keep everything well organized and have consistent procedures to keep things working correctly and ready for the weekend's operations. He clearly uses his military background to hone the club's procedures. Examples of the kind of things Keith has done are: he has created an organized charging station (carefully labeled) for all the batteries; built up a store of glider parts that need regular replacement (like tires) and manufactured shipping crates to send smaller glider parts (like control surfaces) off for repair.
- As with all clubs, Skyline's operations during the past year have been challenging and the number of operations on the weekend days has decreased. Keith routinely volunteered to

increase their operations during the week. Skyline requires a non-flying duty crew for all operations and Keith has been essential for assembling these crews for weekdays during the pandemic. He volunteers to stay on the ground as duty officer and works hard to talk the rest of the crew (instructors, tow pilots and assistants) to join him in volunteering their time to help the club operate. These operations have helped the club members keep flying and students make progress.

- Finally, Keith is always an ambassador to the public about soaring. When people visit Front Royal, he routinely offers a gliding flight to these visitors - at his own expense! He also offers free flights to other aviation tenants at the airport. Naturally, these activities really help promote soaring to the public, but perhaps more importantly, they ensure the acceptance of Skyline Soaring as an important part of the aviation community in Front Royal.

In summary, Keith uses his aircraft maintenance expertise to help keep everything running, has spent large amounts of his free time to help administer the club as a Board member, has been very important in keeping flight operations running during the Covid pandemic and is always willing to help introduce new people to soaring. He is the kind of willing and skilled individual that every soaring club needs to have to be successful. For these reasons, I believe that he is an excellent candidate for a SSA Certificate of Appreciation.

As Keith begins his retirement, we thank him sincerely for his years of service and dedication. He will be greatly missed, and we wish him all the very best in this next chapter of his life."

To the Rescue Marcelo Morichi

It was August and I was excited when my turn came to jump on board on one of the ASKs. I had gotten my license in May that year and was still enjoying the solitude of being in the cockpit by myself.

The conditions were excellent. There were strong thermals and I reached seven thousand feet quickly. As I detailed in a previous article about the unplanned landout that followed that flight, by the time I checked my position I was flying near Woodstock.

After an unplanned landout, and once you realize that you made it safely without injuries or damage to the glider, your mind shifts to how you are going to get out of there. You need a crew, the trailer, and powerful enough vehicle to tow it. Those conditions are not always met during a regular day of operations.

I was lucky. Keith was there. While it was late afternoon, he drove his pick-up truck and led the retrieve crew along Joel Hough and Richard Auer.

Guided by his deep knowledge and efficiency, we disassembled the glider quickly. The drive back to KFRR took over half an hour. He led us in reassembling the glider at the airport.

I am not sure how long Keith planned to stay at the airport that day. He was generous with his time and helped me in a difficult situation. He did it with a smile and a positive attitude.

When we got out of his pickup at KFRR, he even gave me the bag of onions the lady who assisted me at the landout site had given to him. What a guy!



Mid-Atlantic SSA X-Country Development Camp

The SSA Cross-Country Development Camps utilize a standardized syllabus consisting of learning sessions, briefings, task flying, and scoring local competitions. The camps are suitable for all skill levels from ab-initio first Cross-Country flights to experienced Cross-Country pilots wanting to start flying local competitions.



Sponsored by: Mid-Atlantic Soaring Association

Location: Mid-Atlantic Soaring Center Airport (W73)

154 Pecher Road
Fairfield, PA 17320

Dates: 28 June – 4 July 2026

Entry Fee: \$200 plus \$60 per tow

Registration: [SSA.org/event/mid-atlantic-ssa-xc-dev-camp/](https://ssa.org/event/mid-atlantic-ssa-xc-dev-camp/) (must be logged on to website to register)

Checks to: Mid-Atlantic Soaring/ XC camp, 5257 Buckeystown Pike #181, Frederick, MD 21704; PayPal or Zelle (treasurer@midatlanticsoaring.org; note XCC)

Director: Tony Smolder TSMOLDER@att.net 346 244 3681

Manager: Cathy Williams CLSOAR2@gmail.com 717 253 1764



January birthdays for club members:

Kobe Kerns	1/25
Justin Mensen	1/25
Chris Wuerker	1/8



BFSS SOARING WEBINARS

Ralph Vawter

Are you in need of some WINGS credits? How about some training on cross country flying? The Black Forest Soaring Society out of Colorado is presenting a series of webinars that will fill both of those needs. The first webinar was held on January 15th with the topic of Intro to Cross Country. Since this webinar has already been held, you can see it on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLvBDxjLf_w). You only get WINGS credits by attending the live portion of the webinar. You can also find the webinar on the SSA members page (members.ssa.org) under News and Resources → Webinars.

The webinars are held bi-weekly, with the second one being held on January 29th, likely after the publication of this newsletter. The topic will be Air Data Systems. Again, you can catch up by finding the webinar on either YouTube or the SSA website a couple of days after the webinar airs.

To sign up for a webinar, go to the SSA website (SSA.ORG) and search for the calendar. The upcoming events and their titles are there, you can select which one you wish to attend and the link will lead you to the register icon.

Upcoming topics are Intro to Portable Gliding Computers; Speed to Fly; Soaring Pilot Physiology; Collision Avoidance Technology; Model Based Weather Forecasting; Flight Tracking with the final class being about Online Soaring Contests and WeGlide.

The webinars are held on Thursdays; the good news is that they are at 6pm. The bad news is that they are broadcast on Mountain time, meaning they are held at 8pm our time. Check one or two out, it is good information to pick up on during the winter hiatus.



Jim Kellett

FAA Master Pilot

Editor, SKYLINES