

A Special Message from the President

April 28, 2009

Dear fellow 99s,

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the dedication of our volunteers at the international level and to tell to you about important and current operational concerns of The Ninety-Nines.

This year I celebrate 30 years membership with The 99s. My service includes Chapter Chairman, Section Treasurer and Governor, and International Board Treasurer, Vice-President, and now President. My flight time totals over 3000 hours, most of those hours acquired in a Cessna 182. Instrument rated and with a commercial certificate, ASEL and helicopter, I stay current flying to 99s meetings within reach, including Oklahoma City (OKC). My working life began as a Certified Public Accountant. Subsequently, I worked 30 years as co-owner and co-manager of first, a family manufacturing company, then a helicopter tour and charter operation. Acquiring a commercial helicopter rating in my 50s is the highlight of my aviation journey. The only way I could have met that challenge was drawing on the strength of 99s who have paved the way and provided examples of their own fortitude to literally reach for the stars.

A team of women donate thousands of hours each year in order to fulfill the mission of The 99s and I am honored to be a part of that incredible team. None of these women is paid and few are reimbursed for but a small portion of their out-of-pocket expenses. The International Board of Directors and International Committee members along with the trustees of the Amelia Earhart Memorial Scholarship Fund (AEMSF), Amelia Earhart Birthplace Museum (AEBM), 99s Museum of Women Pilots (MWP) and Endowment Fund are dedicated to fulfilling their appointed or elected roles. They give generously of their time and personal funds, and without expectations of laudatory recognition or reimbursement of expenses.

Board meetings are open to all 99s. Attendance at the recent Spring 2009 meeting in OKC totaled 38 women. In addition to the nine board members, we were honored to have trustees, committee chairmen and members and the governors or their representatives from all eight US Sections. All 99s are welcome and I encourage you to attend. The next meeting will be held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting in Chicago.

The overall financial health of The 99s is quite good. The combined balance sheets of the museums, scholarship and endowment funds along with headquarters accounts show over \$5,500,000 in assets and no debt. It is the Board and Trusts intention to keep our balance sheet strong through a long-time relationship with our conservative-minded investment advisor and delaying any need to access an available line-of-credit. We are prepared for difficult times; however, having just paid off that line-of-credit, we are very hesitant to access it again.

The Board chooses to avoid operating with a significantly negative cash flow, thus the need to cut our largest outlays, the magazine and potentially the Directory, until income from our rental

building in OKC can be restored. The 99 News will be published quarterly effective July 1. No decision has been made on the 2009 Directory, but we are gathering facts in order to make an informed decision.

You may have heard concerns about the election process, a process your Board of Directors and Elections Procedures Committee takes very seriously. Our bylaws are very clear that in the odd years, such as 2009, two directors along with the requisite number of trustees (AEBM, MWP, AEMS and Endowment Fund) shall be elected at the Annual Meeting by ballot vote. (Article XI, Section 2(B)). The election information printed in the Jan/Feb issue of The 99News was for even years and thus in error. It was subsequently corrected in the March/April issue.

I'd like to discuss some facts about our buildings. The 99s, Inc., owns three buildings. These are the Amelia Earhart Birthplace Museum in Atchison, Kansas, our two-story Headquarters (HQ) building in OKC, which also contains the Museum of Women Pilots, and the former headquarters building located adjacent to our HQ/MWP. All three of these buildings were fully paid for through donations, not from members' dues. Repairs and upgrades to all these buildings have been funded through donations. Only ongoing annual maintenance in OKC is funded with dues revenues.

The current headquarters building was erected in 1988. A last-minute design change, use of incorrect materials, followed by improper maintenance resulted in a failing foundation, leaking roof, water intrusion and mold. The north wall, designed to be protected by a (never-built) overhead structure, was exposed to the elements for 21 years. Finally, the concrete slab between the two buildings was not graded or poured correctly to handle the average annual OKC rainfall.

Since 2000 nearly all the defects, design-errors and long-delayed maintenance items have been repaired and paid for with donations from individuals, chapters and sections. Your leadership team is immensely grateful for the support received as it could not have been accomplished otherwise. We have one remaining project which will encompass replacing soffits and the upstairs MWP door to withstand the rain, resurface the stairs and balcony to reduce the danger of slippage, and replace the patio with a properly graded and landscaped entry feature. It is here that a beautifully designed and executed tile 99s compass rose will be placed.

In Oklahoma, our buildings occupy land subject to a 99-year lease at \$1. The lease was signed in the mid-1970s giving us many decades of essentially free land. This was a contract negotiated by a previous president and an offer we could not refuse or replace today.

I will acknowledge that until I had the opportunity to visit our Headquarters 15 years after I became a member, I was unable to grasp the significance of this asset. Eighty years of our history is stored in this building. I have handled Amelia Earhart's pilot certificate, gazed at the Harmon Trophy won by Louise Thaden in 1929, and been amazed by the extent of the oral histories available. Ever more deeply I feel the immensity of our heritage and the can-do pioneering spirit of our founders. We are recognized worldwide as **The** International Organization of Women Pilots with unparalleled archives on women pilots. Properly maintaining the structure housing this history is a huge part of our mission.

We own two other buildings, our original headquarters located across the patio from our current HQ building, and the AEBM. The former headquarters is a one-story building generating rental income to supplement the operating budget. Recently, our tenant, RocketPlane, abandoned the lease leaving fixtures and furnishings in payment of the remaining rent. Some of the furnishings have been used in our HQ building and the rest will be used to entice a new tenant. Any unwanted items will eventually be auctioned. The museum in Atchison is funded entirely through its own operations and fund-raising endeavors. The historical structure has been restored to the 1890s period, when Amelia was born there, and in 2008 received a grant from the Hampton Hotels Save-A-Landmark Program to replace the roof.

Each one of you plays a significant role in The 99s. Each one of you is a member of the membership committee and the publicity committee. Each one of you is in a unique position to interact with future members and tell the story of The 99s. Look for women on your home airport and talk to them, invite them to join The 99s. And take the opportunity to speak often and highly of The 99s. The story of its founding is one that most find fascinating.

Over the 80 years of its existence, The 99s has successfully faced challenge after challenge. We will continue to meet challenges by thinking and operating as a team of women focused on the mission. You are all a part of this team, a team comprised of women with unique skills and talents, a team that welcomes your input. Contact your Governor or any Board Member and offer those skills to further our mission. And when you have questions or concerns about our operations, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Susan Larson