



# Coachella Valley R/C Club

## Club History 1938-2003

The Coachella Valley Radio Control Club has come a long way from a loosely knit group of model enthusiasts without a home, to an organization of well over 100 with a professional flying field. Some of the current members of the club have been part of these changes, as they were among the pre-WWII free-flight flyers launching their planes out at the La Quinta Airport (located between Eisenhower and Washington south of Avenue 52).

**Looking back** - From 1938 to 1941 model airplane enthusiasts such as **Bob Taylor, Susie Musashi, Jack Burkett, Rod Leap, George Shepherd** and **Warren Harvey** showed up each week to launch their planes.

“We flew up to the start of the war, quit and then started up again right after the war at the same spot,” Taylor recalled. “They were free flights in the beginning. You set them up to fly in a circle but sometimes the wind came up and blew them off course. All you could do was hope they came back, but I'm sure there are lots on that mountain yet.”

After the war, model airplane flying resumed on an informal basis at various schoolyards, parks, vacant lots or grassy fields. Pilots such as **Don Ahlefeld, Roger Turner** and **Ernie Chapin** were moving up from free flight to control line flying

The next advance in model technology came in the late 40's when remote control was introduced. “It was really remote, remote control,” Taylor said with a laugh. “We had a single channel, one frequency (27.255 megs) which meant we had to take turns flying”

This loosely knit group of weekend pilots continued to meet at airports, schools, in canyons, on ranches, at the fairgrounds or on private property. Unfortunately, as soon as they started feeling at home on private property it was subdivided and sold out from under them. Some of the members during this period were **Tom Curth, Mel Shepherd, Kenny Partlow, Phil "Shorty" Hanson, Monet "Ham" Hamilton, Frank Gomez, Dr. Doug Taylor, Chick Hetrick, Walt Murray, George Seto, Dimitri "Jimmy" Kolaturas, Bill Valley, Walt Peters** and **Dan Metz**.

These determined vagabond flyers continued to move from place to place, sending their planes skyward from storm channels, ultra-light fields and over farmer's crops and

livestock. They were continually on the look out for a field of their own on a level site, away from houses and power lines, but found nothing.

Finally in 1992 they incorporated and were able to lease some land at Avenue 58 and Monroe, which was their 15<sup>th</sup> site. "It was just a dirt strip," Taylor said. "We had no amenities and we had to hack the brush back regularly."

**Getting serious** - It was now 1999 and the members realized their days were numbered at their current location, so began to get serious about finding a permanent location. At this time **Dan Metz**, part of this roving band of model pilots for the last 15 years, was asked by **Bob Taylor** if he wanted to be president. "I told him 'yes,' but insisted had to change our casual structure of no meetings and also work toward a permanent site that would be there for the future," Metz recalled. "On May 9, 1999 we held our first monthly meeting, in years, at Elmer's in Indio. At that time I told the members that I would be willing to serve as president for three years and if at the end of that period I had not been successful in securing a permanent flying site then I would step down."

"From there I put together a plan incorporating the needs of four factions; sailplanes, cars, boats and power planes, but unfortunately none of the other entities did any work, so their interests were not fulfilled. Next I began a search by soliciting the Parks Department of Palm Desert, looked at land out in Desert Hot Springs and checked with the Water District, but encountered problems such as too windy, sound issues, flood zone and access problems."

About this time **Ron Vincent**, who had built a Radio Control Club site in Eastern Oregon, offered to help. He contacted the Bureau of Reclamation in Yuma, Arizona about federal land. They offered several possible sites, but again there were problems with flood barriers, sound problems for Big Horn Sheep and 'gun-toting' Indians that didn't want the group near their Reservation.

"Finally, after many disappointments, the Bureau of Reclamation offered us 240 acres alongside the All American Canal," Metz said. "Wow, we got a 25-year contract for \$1 a year with a chance to renew for another 25 years at the end of that term."

**A permanent home** - Finally the club had a home to call their own, site number 16, but upon close inspection, discovered they would need to do a lot of work and spend a whole lot of money before they could ever fly a plane. The property was littered with old cars, furniture, constructions debris and hundreds of tires: a page right out of the TV series *Sanford and Son*.

The club soon learned that getting the word out about their needs brought positive results.

"I kept telling our story over and over and checks began to come in from developers and large companies," Metz recalled. "KSL, a connection of **Ron Goodspeed's**, sent \$5000 and **Jim Smith**, from avnet.com, donated \$2500, as well as work tables and chairs. People started to really believe in our project."

Club members also added to the pot as they unselfishly donated and loaned money. Another factor was sweat equity as the club members, led by **Bill Gamble**, provided hundreds of man-hours of labor on the field. The model pilots left their planes at home

and descended on the property with bulldozers and caterpillar tractors. **Larry Eaks** got out of his wheel chair and drove a water truck. Tractors scooped up debris and filled dumpsters with every kind of flotsam imaginable. If you couldn't drive a big piece of heavy equipment then you wore work boots and heavy gloves so you could pick up the trash by hand. Once the property was cleared, a road was carved through the brush, sand and rocks and plans were drawn up for a runway and pit area. By May of 2002 the runway was completed and the cement in the pit area had dried. Shade covers were installed and tables and chairs in place. The street sweeper, donated by **Jack Wright**, was safely parked inside the steel storage building (Conex).

A permanent field was now a reality within the time limit suggested by **Dan Metz** when he first became president.

"The best part is that three years after I took office we were grading and paving the runway," he said. "At the end of May all of the dignitaries and local officials were present and we had our opening ceremony."

The RC club members were thrilled with their new quarters.

"Before moving to the desert six years ago, I was flying models in Orange County at the beautiful Mile Square Park, which was converted to a golf course in 1999," said **Murray Ross**, current vice president and newsletter editor. "In comparing the two sites, our current site at Canal Regional Park is actually a more scenic and functional place to fly. I am very pleased with our facility and consider it to be a true gem for modelers in Southern California."

The club has continued to make improvements on their field. **Owen Whiteman** donated park benches, cool misters, and new epoxy coated tabletops. **Dick Knapp** led the way with a fenced in spectator area, while **Gene Poe** drove the big Caterpillar to enlarge the parking area, and thus helped to solve the drainage problems.

**Angels** -The story of creating the facility can never be told without mentioning the angels who made it possible.

**Dan Metz** provided the leadership, was in charge of raising money and kept the members focused on building the best flying site in southern California. He also drove heavy equipment, stored all of the tables, chairs and the steel building in his back yard while waiting for the site to be completed and was the last one to leave the work site each night.

**Bill Gamble** was the foreman for grading and placing of the concrete and often the last to leave at night. Bill was the hardest working person of all, as he ran the transit so we knew how much dirt to move. He was also the point man, getting the rental companies to provide free tractors and blades.

**Gene Poe** came through with equipment and worked tirelessly. He also was responsible for getting the water truck donated to the club.

**Bob Taylor** was the treasurer in charge of writing the checks, but he also drove a tractor and was always there.

**Larry Eaks** built the statue for the field, drove a water truck and got a \$1000 donation from the Indio Rotary Club.

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