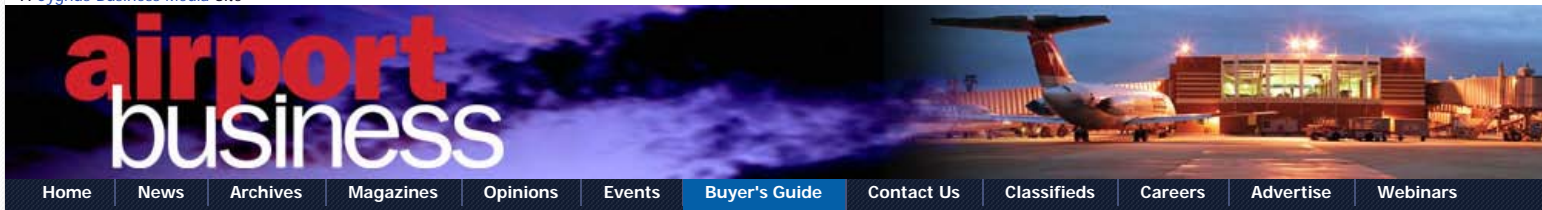


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L-birds in Keokuk

Ralph Hood

I have been to Keokuk, IA, to speak for the annual L-Bird Convention. An L-Bird is a liaison airplane and the convention is made up of people who own, fly, and/or are otherwise involved with or enamored by these historic war birds. The group evolved from the Bird Dog Group, which included the only Cessna Bird Dog. It is a fun group.

They have met in Keokuk since 1989. Believe it or not, this is an international event, with people from 28 states in the U.S. plus Canada and Australia. They meet in Keokuk on the way to the annual AirVenture air show in Oshkosh, WI.

Why Keokuk? Because of the great hospitality of one Irv Lindner, who started Lindner Aviation.

Mr. Lindner was a civilian pilot before WWII. Because he lacked a college degree, he couldn't become an Army Air Force pilot. He therefore joined the Army Reserve, and thus began one of the most fascinating flying careers of WWII.

His first job was instructing WASP pilots. What more could a young single man want than a job teaching young woman to fly the various airplanes ferried by WASPs? That's the way he met the young lady who became his wife, Irene Gregory.

Irv and Irene spent the war ferrying airplanes, and he tells fascinating stories of ferrying P-63 King Cobras to Fairbanks in the winter, C-47s across the Atlantic, and many other airplanes to other places. He picked up brand new Mustangs at the factory. They hadn't even been test flown, so he was the initial test pilot. After the test flight, he officially accepted the airplane for the military, signed the paperwork, and delivered the airplane to wherever it was needed.

After the war, he and Irene came home to visit Keokuk. The town was planning an airport, and offered the young couple the opportunity to manage the yet-to-be-built airport and to start their own FBO/flight school. They did so for the next 55 years, then sold to Bill Engle who managed the airport and FBO until his death in 2000. His widow sold to a group including Greg Gobble, who runs Lindner Aviation to this day and serves as airport manager. What a record of stability. In 63 years the airport has had one FBO and only three airport managers.

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Ralph Hood is a Certified Speaking Professional who has addressed aviation groups throughout North America. A pilot since 1969, he's insured and sold airplanes at retail and distributor levels and taught aviation management for Southern Illinois University. Reach him at ralph@ralphhood.com

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