



CAMPING DELIVERS THE FULL  
OSHKOSH EXPERIENCE



BY BETH E. STANTON





**Check out the digital edition**  
of *EAA Sport Aviation* for a video about  
camping at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh.



**YOU'RE A PILOT OR AN AVIATION ENTHUSIAST**, camping at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh is practically an FAR requirement. Throngs of people flock from around the globe for the airplanes, but it's the camaraderie in the campgrounds that makes AirVenture an experience unique throughout the world. After crowds disperse and evening falls, another side of Oshkosh emerges. The sound of engines is replaced with conversation and laughter. Revelry abounds as new friends are made, old friends reunite, and the

aviation celebration continues long into the night. This version of Oshkosh only happens if you pitch a tent under the wing of a plane or set up your tent or rig on-site. Whether it's your first or 40th year, you'll be welcomed into the fold. Camping with kindred spirits is positively the most Oshkosh-y of ways to do Oshkosh.





## BUILD YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

**DURING AIRVENTURE**, the EAA grounds become the 15th largest “city” in the state of Wisconsin as approximately 40,000 people make 11,600 campsites home for the week. People of a certain age or those with refined tastes who would never dream of camping in any other way, shape, or form gleefully count down the days until they camp at Oshkosh. Depending upon your particular aviation passion and tolerance for “roughing it,” there are many ways and places to camp at AirVenture.

You may fly in and camp with your favorite aircraft type in general aviation or showplane camping or drive in with a tent, trailer, or RV at Camp Scholler. With continual improvements to infrastructure, amenities such as shower facilities, flush toilets, groceries and camp supplies, free public Wi-Fi hotspots, on-site transportation, and expanded dining options help to make camping easy. Veteran campers have devised ingenious ways to elevate the alfresco AirVenture experience to maybe not exactly posh, but certainly downright civilized.

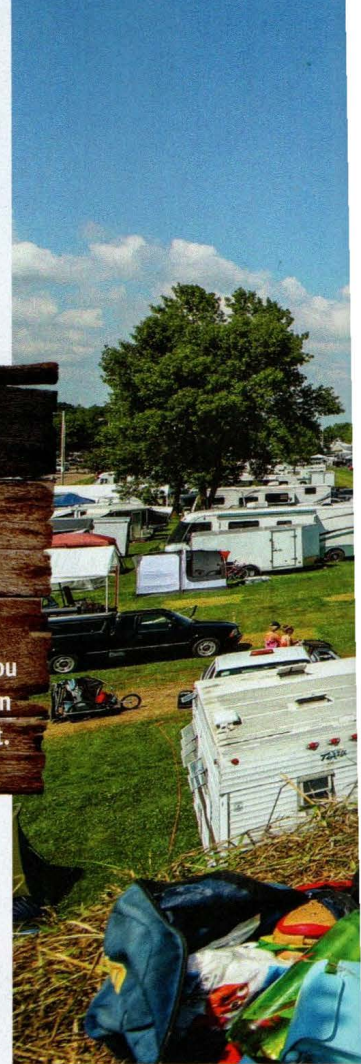
Camping offers both convenience and community. Since you’re already on the convention grounds, fighting traffic to and from the airport each day becomes a nonissue. With your campsite home base, you may take a break midday, put your feet up, then head back to the show renewed. In the evenings, groups and EAA chapters host dinners and celebrations, welcoming newcomers. You’re right there for evening programs at Theater in the Woods and the EAA Fly-In Theater.

## FIVE WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR CAMPING EXPERIENCE

1

### CREATURE COMFORTS

Comfy camp chairs, hammocks, and air mattresses elevate your outdoor experience. You get to look smug while others sit on a towel on the ground and complain that their backs hurt.



## FLY IN OR DRIVE IN

Reservations are not required, and all campsites are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Aircraft camping is divided into general aviation and showplane camping. General aviation aircraft are directed to the North 40 or South 40 camping areas, depending upon the incoming runway used. A designated group area in the North 40 situated north of Runway 9/27 (the North Corral) was created as a trial accommodation allowing pre-arranged groups of aircraft camp together. Showplane camping for aircraft eligible for Homebuilt, Vintage Ultralight, Rotorcraft, Warbird, and Seaplane camping are marshaled to their respective locations.

Located adjacent to the convention grounds, Camp Scholler features tent, trailer, and RV campsites. Select sites have electric and water hookups including areas for those with disabilities and for 24-hour generator use. Additional amenities at Camp Scholler include two grocery stores, an internet café, and an RV pumping station and portable pumping services. EAA chapters have the option of purchasing up to six campsites at Camp Scholler at a reduced flat rate for the duration of the convention rather than paying per day. Last year, 31 chapters registered for a total of 110 campsites.

Camping for attendees with disabilities is available in the North 40 and Camp Scholler. An area in the North 40 closest to the road and convention grounds is sectioned off for handicapped aircraft camping. In Camp Scholler, the first row of campsites with water and electricity is considered the handicapped area on a first-come, first-served basis. Handicapped-accessible showers and toilets are located at the campgrounds. A handicapped-accessible bus circulates through Camp Scholler for transportation to and from the convention grounds. People may bring their own mobility scooters or rent them on-site.





deal AirVenture  
ing experience is  
rent for everyone. Some  
y the view from Camp  
ller (above), and some,  
Allison Wheaton and  
dy Strebig (right) enjoy  
elaxed pace of the  
Seaplane Base.



## 2 KEEP YOUR PLANE FROM BLOWING AWAY

ken airplanes and insurance adjusters: boo.  
ut tie-downs to protect your beloved: yay.

WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR CAMPING EXPERIENCE

### PERSONAL PARADISE

There are variations of the ideal Oshkosh camping experience for different people: from couples, aficionados of particular aircraft, and high-spirited groups to young families with kids. What they all have in common is they've found their favorite people, planes, and places, and then proceed to play in their own personal version of aviation paradise.

### SEAPLANE BASE SERENITY

Randy Strebig, EAA Lifetime 853775, fell in love with seaplanes and bought a Maule M-7 in the late 1990s. Then he fell in love with Allison Wheaton at Jack Brown's Seaplane Base in Winter Haven, Florida, where she was instructing. Over the years, the couple has sampled the gamut of Oshkosh accommodations: hotels, dorms, and the Seaplane Pilots Association farmhouse. As they became more involved in the seaplane scene, they heard how awesome it was to camp at the EAA Seaplane Base. They've been camping there now for nine years.

"This is by far the most enjoyable way to stay at Oshkosh," Randy said.

The seaplane base is situated in a cove on the west shore of Lake Winnebago, 5 miles south of Wittman Regional Airport. It is an enchanting, cool blue and green world with dappled shade and a laid-back vibe. The seaplane community is an even tighter niche within the small world of general aviation. Flying on straight — as opposed to amphibious — floats across the United States creates close bonds as fellow seaplane pilots rely upon each other during their travels. Lifetime friendships made at Oshkosh is the big draw each year for Randy and Allison.

Fly-in camping requires careful consideration of weight and volume of gear. Through years of experience, Randy and Allison have their minimalist requirements down to tent, bedrolls, coffee, and beverages. Seaplane base volunteers greet arrivals at the dock and help with the unloading of gear, taking care not to drop it in the lake, which kids then cart to the campsites.

Even at a distance from the main convention, the seaplane base gets its share of flybys from air show performers. "The AeroShell team makes sure to visit us to be sure we are up," Allison said with a laugh. Seaplane base co-chair Mary Leahy, EAA 1166440, instructs a yoga class each morning on the lakeshore. During class, Allison once noticed an eagle flying overhead as waves lapped against the boats.

"It's all very zen," she said.

The couple enjoys the relaxed environment of the seaplane base, hanging out by the water on picnic tables in the trees surrounded by friends.

"Everybody is excited to be here, happy to see each other, and comes from a positive, authentic place," Allison said. "We only see these people once a year, but we love to spend time with them."



# First Time CAMPING AT OSHKOSH

BY BETH E. STANTON

I ARRIVED A LITTLE LATE to this aviation rodeo, earning my private pilot certificate in July 2011. Making up for lost time, I jumped right away into doing all the pilot things. At the top of the list was the mother of all pilot pilgrimages: EAA AirVenture Oshkosh.

On a whim, I made a last-minute decision to attend Oshkosh 2012. Everyone said I was crazy; rooms were booked out a year in advance and obscenely expensive. Undeterred, I threw a sleeping bag and bivy sack in my backpack and jumped on a big jet bound for Oshkosh. I'd figure something out when I got there.

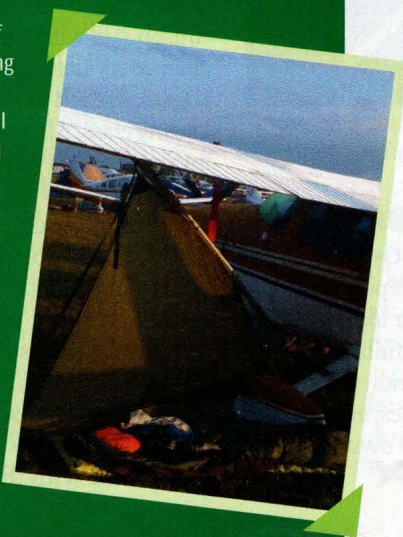
Quite by accident, I discovered that a friend from my local airport in California had flown his Cessna to Oshkosh for the first time. He offered me a place under the wing of his airplane parked in the North 40. I was pleased with how this adventure was shaping up. I was going to have the real Oshkosh experience!

With no tent, I strung a lightweight tarp along the wing strut, protecting myself from the elements on one side at least. In the middle of the night, the rain came from the opposite direction. Now I'd discover if my Gore-Tex bivy was actually waterproof. It wasn't. At least it was a warm rain.

There is a phenomenon I've observed each year at AirVenture that I've nicknamed M.O.O. — the Magic Of Oshkosh. When you move by instinct and impulse, there's a synchronicity and rhythm that puts you in exactly the right place at the right time with the right people. You'll cross paths with a friend or a person destined to become your friend. Turn your head, and in that instant, you'll see exactly what you needed to see.

I have a theory that an immense vortex, like an invisible aurora borealis, swirls above the grounds of Wittman Regional Airport each July. Its upward spiral is powered by the delirious happiness and good humor of half a million people walking around in a state of stark raving bliss.

AirVenture 2018 will mark my fourth convention as a member of the EAA publications team. Working behind the scenes at AirVenture is a different flavor of magic, but still magic nonetheless. I now sleep in lodging with an actual roof, but I'll always remember waking up that first morning at Oshkosh. Opening my eyes level with the grass, I saw a pink-streaked sky and landing gear stretched to the horizon. An engine coughed to life. Covered with dew on top and soggy underneath, I grinned happily. I was camping at Oshkosh!



Left to right: Donna Miller, Stacy Banks, Julia Harrington, and Mara'D Smith.

## WARBIRD ADDICTS

Four buddies decided to pitch in together on an RV and camp for a week in the Warbirds area. All are professional pilots, and three of them volunteer flying the Collings Foundation warbirds. Pretty cool, but not that unusual. But hang on a minute, these four pilots are women.

Mara'D Smith, EAA 1165797, was the ringleader who procured the RV and the coveted spot in Warbirds camping. She just needed some friends to share it with. She assembled her companions after putting out the call on the FAST (Female Aviators Sticking Together) Facebook page. "We're all warbird freaks and work to pay for our addiction," she said.

Stacy Banks is crazy about warbirds and flies for the Collings Foundation. 2017 marked her first AirVenture. Julia Harrington, EAA 780534, had been to AirVenture more than a dozen times but was finally in her element camping in Warbirds.

"I used to camp with my dad at Scholler, which is fun, but this is totally cooler," she said. "At 6 a.m., as soon as everybody is allowed to fire up their engines, you hear it all. It's the best alarm clock."

Donna Miller, EAA 881630, had been to AirVenture multiple times, but camping with the girls in Warbirds was the most fun she'd had yet. All are in agreement that the best part of their all-girl camping posse is "all the warbirds without all the testosterone."

"In your day-to-day life you're not necessarily surrounded by people who are exactly as like-minded," Mara'D said. "This is like the most extreme version of that. We all geek out about the same things. They are as excited as me about these cool amazing airplanes. My other friends would have been like, 'Oh, that's cool,' but we're like, 'THAT IS SO COOL!'"

After Donna bought a PT-22, she was told it was the gateway drug to warbirds.

"They were right," she said. "I came for the airplanes, but I stay for the veterans. Everything that I hold dear is right here."



## RATES OF THE NORTH 40

Everybody loves the airplanes, but if you don't have the campers, I don't think AirVenture would be the event that it is," said Darren Pralle, EAA 698343, logistics coordinator for the Pirates of the North 40. The pirates are a group of about a dozen airplanes and 45 people who've been camping together at AirVenture for more than a decade. They have set up camp in the North Corral.

## 3 CHARGE IT

Dead batteries on devices create emotional stress that is easily avoided. A solar charger, a backup battery pack, or availing yourself of the many charging stations around the grounds will keep you calm and connected.

WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR CAMPING EXPERIENCE



The Pirates have honed their operation over the years. Realizing it was more cost-effective, they pooled funds and purchased camping gear that is stored in a unit in Oshkosh. They camp in style with a solar power station, sink with running water, a smoker, grills, tables, chairs, and a couple dozen bicycles. A large tent serves as a central gathering place. A rental vehicle hauls gear from the storage unit and is used daily for ice (200-300 pounds per day) and grocery runs.

Once camp is set up, there is shade, provisions, and everything needed to hang out with pilot friends for a week. Sitting in a chair with a cold beverage, they watch the air show and planes taxi by.

"There's nothing like seeing a line of T-6s on the taxiway, a B-17 with the wings out over the grass going over your head as it passes by, or a row of P-51s doing a run-up 30 feet from your tent," Darren said. "It's an experience like no other."

The Pirate operation runs on caffeine. Coffee meister John Theune, EAA 9002774, is first up to make coffee. Breakfast consists of 6 pounds of bacon and three dozen eggs. Some folks are raring to get into the show, others go flying, and still others hang around camp until early afternoon catching up with friends. In the evening, everyone comes back for dinner, watching airplane arrivals and telling stories.

"Oshkosh is unlike any other place on the planet," Darren said. "If you haven't been, it's almost impossible to adequately describe it."

He said it's fun when somebody new joins the group.

"The first day they walk around like a little kid at Christmas," he said.

Pirate technical director Leon Jackler, EAA 602167, was flying back one afternoon before the air show and was on short final for Runway 9 when the tower requested he make a right turn onto the grass after landing for departing traffic. "We'd like a left turn to park at the pirate camp," Leon replied. The tower responded, "Yarrrrh!"







## ALL IN THE FAMILY

Tommy Suell, EAA 1177704, wanted to fly his Christen Eagle to the International Aerobatic Club (IAC) 40th anniversary celebration of the type at AirVenture 2017. His wife Tambi, EAA 1226108, loaded a van with camping gear and their four girls, Mika, age 11, Amelia, age 5, Piper, age 4, and Aurora, age 2, and drove from Las Vegas, Nevada, to meet her husband at Oshkosh. Tommy, a chief pilot who flies a PC-12, started in aviation by flying hang gliders, paragliders, and ultralights. He flew a Carbon Cub to AirVenture 2015 and camped with friends in the Ultralights area. AirVenture 2017 was the family's first trip to Oshkosh and their first time camping.



Left to right: Mika, Tambi, Aurora, Piper, Tommy and Amelia Suell

They bought the biggest tent they could find and pitched it on the ultralight flight-line facing the grass runway. After a trip to Costco, they had a big cooler filled with provisions for the duration. Tambi said the family is on a budget and camping made a week at AirVenture affordable. The adventure held many firsts for the kids including humidity, bugs, sleeping bags, campfires, and toasting marshmallows. The family visited KidVenture, the EAA museum, and the seaplane base, and hung out at the IAC pavilion where the Eagle was parked.

The logistics of packing diapers, snacks, and clothes for three kids each morning came with its challenges. As counterintuitive as it might seem, Tambi found that camping was convenient.



## 4 STAY DRY

It *will* rain. Make sure your tent is watertight, put a tarp underneath, pitch it on high ground, and close the windows when departing the campsite.

FIVE WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR CAMPING EXPERIENCE



"You don't have to fight traffic, unload and load everything into the car and hotel," she said. "If everybody gets tired, they hop in the wagon and we go to the tent for a nap." Tambi and the girls were taking an afternoon nap when she heard the B-1 fly by during the air show.

"I came out just as it was doing a circle over our tent," she said. "It was amazing to see the afterburners!" The baby was sleeping so soundly, she didn't even flinch at the deafening sound.

Ultralight camping is located toward the south end of the airport, but there was no shortage of spectacles to be seen from the campsite. They woke up in the morning to hot air balloons and were front and center for the debut of the Twilight Flight Fest at the Fun Fly Zone, watching the paramotor Paradigm Aerobatic Team, 3-D RC performances, and the STOL competition.

"You don't get that experience if you leave and come back," Tommy said. "You don't have to go to a hotel where there are normal people. You're just living the experience, surrounded by aviation."

Tambi has been trying to earn her private pilot certificate for more than a decade but has been busy raising her family. She recently completed her long solo cross-country flight.

"Amelia asked me, 'Mama, did you hang out at the airport when you were little?' and I said 'No, baby,'" Tambi said. "It makes me so happy to give them things that I never had. And Oshkosh, oh my gosh! I never dreamed of coming here, let alone bringing my girls. It's amazing to be able to give that to my kids."



## OSHKOSH RULES

Unspoken "Oshkosh rules" stretch back to the example set by EAA founder Paul Poberezny after the first EAA fly-in in Oshkosh, Wisconsin: be neighborly, be respectful, and clean up after yourself.

These are the things that shouldn't have been said, and they don't have to be said," said David Leiting, EAA's chapter president for each specialist.

David said he thinks the people who attend AirVenture are a microcosm of the best of America.

People look out for one another here and are always there to help," he said.

Everybody is in such a good mood because they enjoy the week so much."

Everyday rituals such as making coffee or showering may require a little more time when camping, but stepping outside your comfort zone is where magic happens. Breaking routine and slowing down allows you to be present in the moment and open to the wonderful you might otherwise miss. The best party of the year is happening this July in the campground at AirVenture. Your invitation has been delivered, and the pleasure of your company is requested. Family you didn't even know had will be waiting there for you. Will this be the year that you join them? **EAA**

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