

Lifelong devotion to flight brings pilot national honor

By Dave Nordstrand nordstrand@thecalifornian.com 9:54 a.m. PDT June 28, 2014



(Photo: Provided photo.)

The late Betty Ardell ("Dell") Hinn, a pilot from Salinas who often flew with her pet poodle Pepe by her side, has been honored nationally for her more than 50 years of devotion to aviation and her 10,000 hours of flight time.

"Dell was a lady with a big smile, a woman full of energy and enthusiasm for flying and for life," said Joanne Nissen of Soledad, a fellow aviator.

In a June 14 ceremony, Hinn was inducted into the International Forest of Friendship in Atchison, Kansas, Amelia Earhart's birthplace. The Forest is a living, growing memorial to the history of aviation and aerospace. Its 1,400 honorees include Earhart, Charles Lindbergh, Chuck Yeager and the Wright Brothers as well as significant, but lesser-known, names.

Hinn's flying career took off in 1946. A friend had taken her for an airplane ride. The ride morphed into a lesson. Hinn was invited to put her hands on the controls. She did, at the same time gazing out at the clouds drifting by

and at the hills and rivers below anchored below.

She was hooked. She moved to Honolulu, got her private pilot certificate and took her first passenger, her own mother, for a ride.

One hallmark of Hinn's flying career was the large variety of forms it took.

"My mom had 10,000 hours of flight time," said Carol Champlin, Hinn's daughter. "She had all kinds of ratings."

Hinn's versatility as a pilot was a part of her expertise. During the 1970s, for example, she flew several hundred towing flights out of the Vacaville Glider Port, owned and operated by her son. She was a corporate pilot in the Salinas Valley and a charter pilot for Air Trails in Salinas. The Monterey County Sheriff's Department hired her for five years to fly female inmates from Salinas to prisons around the Southwest.

Once airborne, Hinn would unlock the prisoners' handcuffs, so they could ride more comfortably in the plane, Champlin said. Rather than tote a gun, "Deputy Dell" toted a batch of snicker doodles and iced tea for her prisoners.

When Dell married Dr. George Hinn in 1965, she'd already logged 4,000 hours in the air. The newlyweds made an agreement. He would not tell her how to fly. She, in turn, would not tell her what to do in the operating room, according to a Forest of Friendship biographical sheet. Dr. Hinn, by the way, was a surgeon who served as doctor for the Salinas High School football teams.

Kay Harmon of Salinas, inducted into the Forest of Friendship but in 2013, recalled flying with Hinn.

"I was a fresh, new pilot," Harmon said. "I was reassured when Dell said, 'I'll ride in the rear,'" a vote of confidence by the veteran pilot in Harmon's newly-minted flying skills.

Hinn also flew in aerial races. Harmon remembers well when Hinn tested her own racing skills on a flight with Harmon from Salinas to Harris Ranch off U.S. 5.

"Dell was an avid racer," Harmon said. "She wasn't above taking the carefully worked-out risk. As a racer, you fly low, and you fly fast. That's what Dell did on the way to Harris Ranch. We flew into the Pinnacles below the peaks and between the rock formations. I held my breath."

Hinn's extensive racing resume, in fact, shows she raced 12 Powder Puff Derby races, several with her daughter and granddaughter. Those among many other major races.

When she turned 80, Hinn retired from flying. She'd lived in Salinas from 1950 until 2007, when she moved to the Reno area to be nearer her granddaughters and their families.

Commercial pilot, charter pilot, flight instructor. With support from George, her husband, she organized and took part in Wings for DRF, Direct Relief Fund. DRF collected surplus medical supplies and sent them to needy countries throughout the free world. Hinn also flew as a volunteer for Angel Flight, which gives free air transport to indigent cancer patients and burn victims to UCLA Medical Center, Stanford Medical Center and other such destinations.

The Forest of Friendship -- made of trees from 50 states and 35 countries around the world where honorees live -- was a gift to America on the Nation's 200th birthday from the City of Atchison and the Ninety-Nines, Inc., an international organization of women pilots. Hinn was an active life member in the Ninety-Nines Monterey Chapter.

She was in the AOPA, Aircraft Owners and Pilots Assoc.; and in SOPA, the Salinas Owners and Pilots Assoc.

Not to forget the dog, that chocolate-colored standard poodle that often flew with her. Pepe proved to be a perfect passenger and often drifted into a blissful canine nap high above earth.

For more on the International Forest of Friendship, go to www.ifof.org (<http://www.ifof.org>)

Read or Share this story: <http://bit.ly/1lmo33q>

MORE STORIES



Salinas High FFA dazzles Haitian visitors

[\(/story/news/2014/06/28/salinas-high-ffa-dazzles-haitian-visitors/11568997/\)](http://www.thecalifornian.com/story/news/2014/06/28/salinas-high-ffa-dazzles-haitian-visitors/11568997/)

Salinas High FFA dazzles Haitian visitors/11568997/

June 28, 2014, midnight



AAA: More to travel for Fourth of July

[\(/story/life/2014/06/28/aaa-travel-fourth-july/11420705/\)](http://www.thecalifornian.com/story/life/2014/06/28/aaa-travel-fourth-july/11420705/)

AAA: More to travel for Fourth of July/11420705/

June 28, 2014, midnight



Listening begins the healing process

[\(/story/life/2014/06/28/listening-begins-healing-process/11414357/\)](http://www.thecalifornian.com/story/life/2014/06/28/listening-begins-healing-process/11414357/)

Listening begins the healing process/11414357/

June 28, 2014, midnight