

# Flight Club

THINK THE SCOTTSDALE BREAKFAST CLUB IS A CAFÉ IN OLD TOWN? IT'S A GROUP OF PILOTS WHO MEET MONTHLY FOR ADVENTURE AND A SIDE OF HASH BROWNS.

**A**UTOPILOT IS OFF. Flaps set to takeoff. Windows and doors, check. "OK, let's go aviate," says Warren McIlvoy, founder of the Scottsdale Breakfast Club, as he lifts the plane toward Page to rendezvous with the other pilots.

Aviation culture has a tradition called "The \$100 Hamburger." Pilots hop into their Cessna or Beechcraft Bonanza, fly to a municipal airport in some rural town, have a burger and fly back - the cost in fuel and incidentals amounting to about a hundred bucks.

Because of rising gas prices, it's now The \$300 Hamburger. But that doesn't deter the 180-odd members of the Scottsdale Breakfast Club, a group of pilots who meet once a month to fly around the state and chew the fat, both literally and figuratively.

The idea was born, appropriately, over breakfast. It was December 1993. Pilot pals Richard Azimov and McIlvoy had flown from the Scottsdale Municipal Airport to Prescott for a \$100 omelet and were ruing the recent changes to the Valley flying scene.

"Most anyone who flew in the Valley belonged to the [now defunct] Scottsdale Aero Mech Flying Club," McIlvoy says. "But then they started training foreign students, so the social aspect dried up."

Azimov suggested they get a group together to fly once a month. "I said we could fly for breakfast and call it the Scottsdale Breakfast Club," McIlvoy says.

Their first official event took place the following month. A total of eight pilots and wives flew to Marana and ate at the Sky Rider Café.

Thanks to McIlvoy's diligence, the club has met consistently for the past 16 years, expanding to include pilots who park their planes at municipal airports across the Valley. Most months about 15 pilots participate; the record was 55 for a trip to Parker. Why Parker? McIlvoy can't fathom the reason, either. For these aviation junkies, it's more about the journey than the destination.

Hang out with the members of the Scottsdale Breakfast Club, and you quickly learn a few things about these pilots:

1. They love to fly.
2. They use that love to do good. Most of them volunteer (and foot the high costs) for associations like Flights for Life, a non-profit that provides emergency transport of



people and donor blood to hospitals statewide. Members remain on-call, sometimes flying blood in the middle of the night from the donation center in Phoenix to outlying cities like Yuma or Page.

Many also volunteer with Flying Samaritans, an association of local pilots who fly doctors once a month to a small town in Baja, Mexico, where they provide free treatment to patients at a clinic built by the Samaritans themselves.

3. They love to talk about flying, especially the horror stories. As the pilots tuck in to omelets and burgers at Ranch House Grille, a greasy spoon near the Page airport, the conversation turns to the day the turbulence was so severe that McIlvoy hit his head on the plane's ceiling. And the time that plane got stuck in a tree. And the morning he arrived at the airport to find his plane upside-down.

4. They're a hardy bunch. On the flight back from Page, the group's planes are blasted by a 30-40 mph headwind that ricochets between the mountains north of Flagstaff, then buffeted by heat updrafts near Phoenix. The sensation is akin to hurtling through the sky at 11,000 feet inside a tiny washing machine during the spin cycle. Yet the airwaves hum with understatement: "It's a little bumpy," remarks one pilot. "The



The Scottsdale Breakfast Club enjoys breakfast in Page.

air's a little oatmeal, but it could be worse," responds another.

It's certainly not going to deter these pilots from volunteering, or from flying in next month's Scottsdale Breakfast Club excursion, when the details of today's turbulence will be rehashed over hash browns.

— Keridwen Cornelius