



Robert Irwin



Cleo Bickford

# The Nineteenth Green



Any community worth its salt will have an airport, be it large or small. If I ask you, “Where is the Cypress Airport?” And if you answer that it borders Hwy 290, between Huffmeister and Telge, you will be only half-correct. Cypress actually has two airports. The second airport, Dry Creek, is one of the most colorful additions to our area and one of Cypress’s best kept secrets.

To local residents, it is known as their “Nineteenth Green.”

Between Spring Cypress and Huffmeister, along Skinner Rd, the sod runway for Dry Creek peeks out between the subdivisions and hangars, which surrounds it. This is a private flying community, which began when the area was mostly farms and wildlife. When it began, traffic problems were deer on the runway. The airport was a dream of Cleo Bickford. He made it a reality in 1969 when he and a partner, John Kane, bought enough land to level out a runway. That quaint beginning has evolved into the Skinner Road Airport Community Association which is managed by forty owners and is registered with the Federal Aviation Authority.

“Early on we had no runway lights,” Cleo laughs and continues with his story. “But Jonesy Paul had

this real bright porch light. If we got caught out after dark, we just flew to the light.” Times have changed and the old runway has modernized. The old dirt surface has been replaced with a beautiful turf mat of grass, which is the same grass used at Reliant Center. Lights have been installed as well as a rotating beacon. An instrument approach should be available by November 2006. The benefits afforded by the 3,740-foot-long runway airport are a tremendous asset to the community. In this unincorporated area of Harris County, access by Life Flight is critical and the airport is a recognized location by all emergency services. With the volunteer fire department maintaining a fire station within a mile of the airport, they are an available critical link for patient transport.

The airport was named after Dry Creek, which sits at the end of the runway. Being a private field, the only planes that are allowed to take off and land are those of the association with some guest privileges allowed. Strict rules of plane safety and flight patterns apply to all members and guest of the association. “We want to be good neighbor’s,” Cleo said. “We open the airport once a year, in the fall, and invite everyone in the community to come and visit. It gives everyone a chance to see the different planes and our airport.”

The Young Eagles program, which provides meaningful flight experience – free of charge – for young people between the ages of eight and seventeen is one of the programs that members of the association support.

Dry Creek is also home base to aircraft that support Angel Flight. This is a voluntary service that provides free transportation to needy patients

and health care organization that require medical treatment and facilities that are unavailable in outlying areas.

As the planes take off, Last Chance, a German Shepherd, watches from the sidelines. He is the official mascot of the field and he acquired his name from his predecessor. “Our first dog liked to chew on the planes and this dog is our “last chance” for a mascot,” explained Layton Curd, one of the residents. There is a lot of laughter and neighborhood support in a community of flyers. Instead of walking down the street to talk, golf carts dart up and down the sides of the runway. Someone is always working on a plane and other are there to help.

A 750,000-gallon pond is used for the sprinkler system to keep the sod green and pliable in the hot summer months. The association has a community gas tank which hold 3,000 gallons of fuel for the planes. All of these amenities, plus the coming GPS, will make Dry Creek the second only private grass field in the United States with instruments landing.

Each pilot has a unique story to tell. Robert Irwin, treasurer of the association, is only the seventh person to ever fly solo around the world in a two-engine plane. A map inside his hangar shows the route that began in Cypress and ended in Cypress seven weeks later. Several of the residents are commercial pilots and fly for fun on their off days. Others have built their own planes or restored antique planes. All are interesting, gracious pilots and community members, who love to fly, and who have made Cypress a very nice place to land. ■

