

VanGrunsvens, Chapter 105 Volunteers Restore *Little Gee Bee*

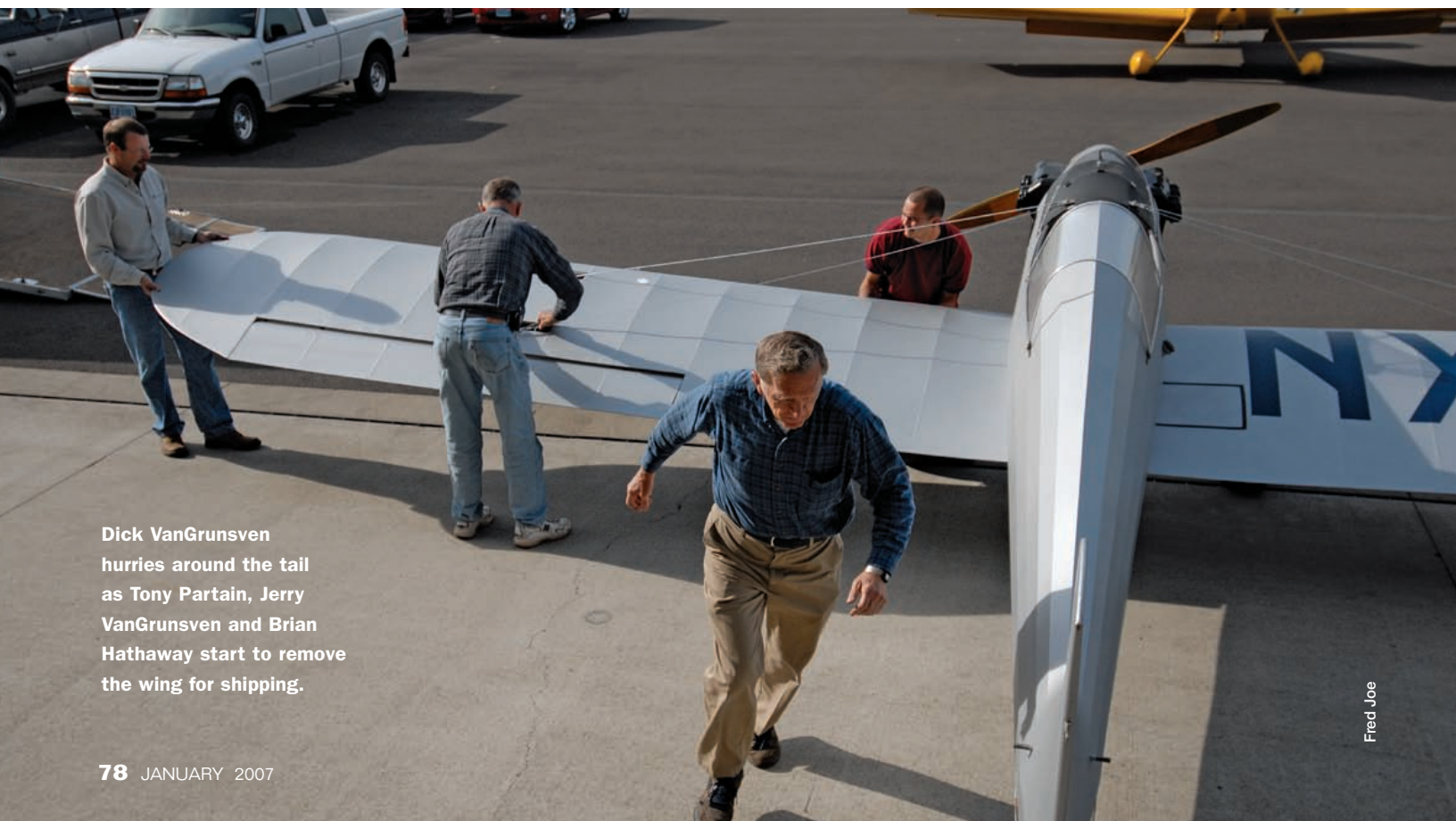
Historic craft goes to Smithsonian

KEN SCOTT

In 1997, Portland, Oregon's, EAA Chapter 105 received an unexpected windfall. Homebuilt pioneer George Bogardus (one of the early inductees into the EAA Homebuilders Hall of Fame) passed away and left his estate to the chapter. Nobody saw it coming. Bogardus had never participated in the EAA and hadn't been an active pilot for many years. Perhaps the memory of visits by a charter member of the chapter influenced his decision: as a teen-

ager Dick VanGrunsven had often flown his Taylorcraft into Bogardus' strip, and they had remained friends over the years.

Although Bogardus lived a simple life and never accumulated financial wealth, his small acreage overlooking the Sandy River, southeast of Portland, had increased dramatically in value since he moved onto it in the 1940s. Chapter 105 was able to sell the property for a substan-



Dick VanGrunsven hurries around the tail as Tony Partain, Jerry VanGrunsven and Brian Hathaway start to remove the wing for shipping.

tial sum. It used the money to establish the George and Lillian Bogardus Memorial Trust, which produces earnings that are used for youth aviation education and scholarships.

Before the property could be sold, there was a lot of work to do. VanGrunsven, designer of the popular line of RV airplane kits, headed a crew that cleaned up the property. It was a major task. In later life, Bogardus had become somewhat reclusive, and once he had acquired something, he *never* threw it away. His interests had included printing, airplanes, trap shooting, amateur radio, and more. After all the rusting printing presses, airplane parts, sundry mechanical debris, and towering piles of old magazines were removed, they found the fuselage and other parts of a small single-seat airplane.

In the world of experimental airplanes, this one is as historically significant as any you could find.

After World War II, private citizens who wanted to build their own aircraft were left in limbo. Before the war, federal authorities had not permitted homebuilts, but a couple of states had their own licensing agencies. Oregon had taken responsibility for licensing aircraft, issuing unique metal license plates to factory-built and amateur-built machines alike. After the war, the federal Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) became paramount, and it made no provision for permanently licensing amateur-built airplanes.

George Bogardus, then living in the tiny town of Gresham, Oregon, decided to do something about the oversight. Before the war he had been active in the homebuilt aviation scene and worked for designer Les Long. Going back to those roots, he located and refurbished a single-seat airplane (derived from one of Long's designs) that had been built in 1938 by another Oregonian, the late Tom Story. He replaced the original 40-hp Continental with a Continental 65, added a compass and second fuel tank behind the seat, and christened the airplane *Little Gee Bee*. Despite the

IN 1947 GEORGE BOGARDUS received permission to fly cross-country from Oregon to Washington, D.C., in his homebuilt aircraft, *Little Gee Bee*. The flight demonstrated that it could be done safely and furthered discussions with the federal Civil Aviation Authority (the CAA, predecessor of the FAA). Bogardus' flight and subsequent meetings were instrumental in the CAA creating a federal category for homebuilt aircraft in 1951. The new Civil Aeronautics Manual No. 1 that delineated procedures for issuance of airworthiness certificates for amateur-built aircraft was officially adopted on September 19, 1952.



MIDDLE: Two volunteers from Chapter 105 work on the elevator.

BOTTOM: Jerry VanGrunsven was a force in keeping the project moving. Here he gives some tips on covering to another volunteer.

Dick VanGrunsven

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Jerry VanGrunsven

name, the airplane had no similarity or connection whatever to the famous Gee Bee racers built by the Granville brothers—other than George Bogardus' initials.

The work was done with a plan in mind. Bogardus and a few friends had

hatched the idea of flying a home-built airplane to Washington, D.C., to show officials that amateur-built airplanes could be safe and reliable and there was no need to restrict them with things like 30-day licenses.

In 1947, with a temporary license



Jerry VanGrunsven

TOP: Before covering, the wings and fuselage were rejoined, for the first time in almost 50 years.

LEFT: Dick VanGrunsven applies covering to the metal frame.

in hand, Bogardus folded himself into the tiny welded seat and set off, crossing the Cascade and Rocky Mountains en route to the nation's capital. Stopping often along the way to promote his fledgling American Airman's Association, he landed safely, days later, in Deer Park, Long Island, New York. From there, he and other members of the group flew to Washington, where they lobbied the CAA to write regulations allowing those who wanted to build their own airplanes to do so legally.

He was politely received, and some temporary provisions were actually enacted. Not satisfied, Bogardus repeated the trip in 1951. Finally, the CAA (now the FAA) saw the light and wrote a provision specifically allowing individuals to build and license airplanes in an "experimental amateur-built" category for their own "education and recreation."

His mission accomplished, Bog-



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Jerry VanGrunsven

ardus returned to Oregon, where he settled with his wife, Lillian, on a remote bluff above the Sandy River and carved out a tiny airstrip. His American Airman's Association had achieved its goal and slowly faded away. His interests turned away from flying, and after *Little Gee Bee* sat outside for several years, friends helped him dismantle it and store it in various outbuildings on his property and

on the nearby Sandy River Airport.

By the time the Chapter 105 crew arrived, the airplane was in rough shape. The fabric had long since been removed from the fuselage and one wing. The other wing still had its original lightweight 1939 fabric but had become a major mouse motel, and the little critters caused damage to the steel truss between the spars. The engine was disassembled



Jerry VanGrunsvan

Materials for covering *Little Gee Bee* were donated by PolyFiber, and applied by volunteers from Chapter 105 in Dick VanGrunsvan's shop.

and thrown into several boxes. The wheels—originally 3-inch units from an old Aeronca—were badly corroded, and the tires were rotted beyond redemption. The wood spars and ribs of the wire-braced wing were intact, but there was enough damage and rot to render them unairworthy. Eventually, the crew recovered everything needed to restore the airplane to display status.

Chapter members carefully reviewed the logbooks and snapshots that had been recovered with the airplane and pored over old newspaper and magazine articles. Joe Brockaway, a friend of both George and Lillian, made himself something of a historian, preserving correspondence, letters, and artifacts that proved invaluable. Even so, a substantial amount of detective work was necessary to understand and fabricate parts that

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