

CULTURAL MOMENT FOR JUNE 3, 2024

CELEBRATING THE YORK SOARING ASSOCIATION

The York Soaring Association was founded in 1961 by Walter Chmela, who came to Canada from his native Austria in 1950. Operations commenced when Walter personally purchased two Doppleraab two-seat trainers and an Auster as a tow-plane. Walter realized that the future of York Soaring was dependent upon the club owning its own airfield. In 1969, he purchased the field the club still operates on today in the former West Garafraxa.



The field was initially a 100-acre property, 8 kilometres east of Arthur and, upon purchasing it, a hangar was built and a single 2,000-foot east-to-west runway was graded. A few years later, an adjoining 100-acre property was added and a northwest-to-southeast runway, as well as a southwest-to-northeast runway was built. Another larger hangar was added for club aircraft and the original hangar was left for use by private owners.

York Soaring has an active social committee that puts on regular barbecues and fundraising dinners. Their next big event is on Saturday, June 22, when York Soaring hosts an Antique Aircraft Fly-In, starting at 10:00 AM and ending at sunset. More information can be found at yorksoaring.com.

York Soaring also has a group that specializes in mentoring badge and cross-country flying, and others that take part in excursions to other flying venues around the world such as the United States, France, and New Zealand. York Soaring is also the home base of Youth Flight Canada (YFC) and Freedom's Wings. YFC provides bursaries to deserving young people who need financial assistance to fly. YFC pays 50% of their nominal membership fee and all but \$5.00 of each flight.

In May 2007, Walter received national recognition for his almost 70 years of service to soaring by being inducted into the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame.

Having grown up on the farm next to the club, it was one of Bonny McDougall's jobs to go to the area at the end of the runway and look for tow ropes. They would occasionally snap off the tow planes as they were coming in for landing.



"When I found one, I would take it back to the hangar and have a visit with Walter and after I was 16, I got a complimentary glider ride with him. They were and continue to be wonderful neighbours."

The older gliders have all been replaced with 6 updated planes being basic trainers and high-performance trainers, as well as increasing the tow planes from 2 to 4.

By following the vision for York Soaring that Walter had almost 50 years ago, York Soaring continues to bring new members into the very special world of soaring. Whatever your age or physical ability, you are welcome at York Soaring. It's getting better all the time.

Submitted by Bonny McDougall, Wellington North Cultural Roundtable