

# Flying Farmer Don Bankson serves as director

For as long as Don Bankson can remember he's been fascinated with airplanes. So it seemed only natural that he eventually would join the Nebraska Flying Farmers and Ranchers organization.

A relative new member of the organization, the rural Hordville farmer has become active in Flying Farmers and Ranchers the past five years — he now serves as Director of District I in Nebraska. "That's where I'd like to stay. Being an officer takes too much time and money. They fly all over the United States to conventions and workshops," he said.

Don's interest in airplanes is credited back to his Uncle Amos Bankson who started flying in the 1920s. Amos owned an airplane in partnership with another man and eventually became a flying instructor. "He taught Navy pilots in World War II," Don explained.

Don turned 18 in the fall of 1945, just as his uncle was returning home from WWII. "I started taking flying lessons from him, but I got drafted and had to quit," he said. While the service took up most of his time, Don said he still managed to squeeze in some flying lessons and in October of 1946 he soloed in El Paso, Tex. Don wasn't the only Bankson brother to try his hand at flying — four out of the five brothers have done some flying, he said.

Upon his discharge from the Army, Don returned to the Hordville area and often flew his uncles Piper Cub. That airplane is still running, even though it was damaged in a fire. Don explained he agreed to store his uncle's plane for him and had removed the wings to conserve on space. The wings were destroyed when the barn they were stored in burned down. The Piper Cub was eventually sold through his uncle's estate, restored and is still being used.

Don said he quit flying for several years when his children were small, but started up again in 1976. "I sat down and cried when he came home and told me he bought that airplane," his wife recalled. "I thought we needed other things a lot worse, like a better car or a newer house," she added.

During the first few years after he purchased the airplane he took it on several trips near Spencer and an acquaintance there talked him into joining Flying Farmers and Ranchers. "I joined right after we took part in a fly-in at Minden in 1981. The people were so friendly and we found we had a lot in common," Don said.

Since that time he has participated in many fly-ins, including hosting the Aurora fly-in the first Sunday in November last year.

Don said the Flying Farmers get together at least six times a year for

fly-ins. Included are the President's Fly-in, Queen's Fly-in, the annual convention, Christmas party, Fourth of July Fly-in in Seward and Ak-Sar-Ben. "We could get a lot more involved in it that we are, but it gets expensive," he explained.

The Banksons said while they are involved with Flying Farmers on the state level, it is a national organization which reaches into Canada. "In Nebraska alone there are more than 250 members," he said. Nebraska members do enter into the national picture — Curtis Phillips of Beaver Crossing is the national treasurer and former Henderson resident Elain Doell, now from Elsie, is the reigning international duchess.

## RECREATIONAL FLYING

Don said the majority of his flying time is spent on recreational flying. They have flown to Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, Montana, Wyoming, Wisconsin, Chicago and into Canada, as well as to El Paso, Tex. to watch the Cornhuskers play in the Sun Bowl one year. "I've reached 2,500 hours of flying time now and last year the Flying Farmers gave me the award for flying the most hours," Don said. He estimates he has been up in 25 different airplanes and has pilot several different ones himself.

The rural Hordville farmer said it is sometimes hard to find the time to take his Piper Cherokee up. Together with sons Dan and Randy, the Banksons farm 1,800 acres of corn, milo and soybeans and have 250 head of cattle in the feedlot. "We also do a lot of custom work — haying, baling, windrowing and land leveling," Don said.

The Banksons are the parents of five children. Randy and his wife Marti and children Jeremy and Sara farm southwest of Hordville. David and wife Christine and children Ron, Renee, John, Tina and Brad farm southeast of Hordville. Jan and her husband Randy Blase and son B.J. live in Central City.

Dan farms with his father and Randy and Craig is a student at Kearney State College.

Don said the Banksons' interest in airplanes has filtered down to his children. "Dan flies a little and Craig has passed his written test for the helicopter and will probably go on with it," he said.

Don explained that it takes about 45 hours of flying time, including dual, solo and cross country flying. "I really think the training should be tougher though. There's so much involved in flying and 45 hours isn't really much time," he said.

The Banksons are strong supporters of the Flying Farmers and Ranchers organization. "It's educational as well as recreational. They have a lot of meetings with good speakers. We have one or two educational fly-ins each year and the conventions deals with education and agriculture. They also promote safety and have a 'land it' program for wives so they can learn to land an airplane in an emergency," Don said.

"We're always making new friends. We treasure the people we've met through Flying Farmers," his wife added.

Don said it is really interesting talking to some of the olde members of Flying Farmers. "From listening to their experiences I think some of them must have nine lives," he laughed.

Mrs. Bankson said a comment by a Canadian member of Flying Farmers summed up their feelings about the organization: "Flying Farmers are special people and we treasure each encounter. We can learn so much from one another, share experiences, work together to improve agriculture and aviation and have fun in the process."





**READY FOR TAKEOFF** — Don and Donna Bankson of rural Hordville ready their Piper Cherokee for takeoff from the Aurora Airport. Don has logged 2,500 hours of flying

time, including attending may fly-ins as part of the Flying Farmers and Ranchers organization.—News-Register Photo by Laurie Pfeifer.