

SUMMERLIN

Looking skyward

Kite fliers find peace in pastime. **ARTS**

HOME NEWS

SERVING THE SOUTH AND WEST COMMUNITIES OF SUMMERLIN | April 4-10, 2008



Chuck Brinlee launches his radio-controlled model sailplane at the Las Vegas Soaring Club gathering.

JUMMEL HIDROSOLLO/SPECIAL TO THE HOME

Soaring like an eagle

Las Vegas club flies remote-controlled model sailplanes weekly

By **JEFF O'BRIEN**

Greg Clemensen, president of the Las Vegas Soaring Club, squinted up toward the bright blue sky with focus and concentration.

Several hundred feet in the air above western Summerlin, his bright red glider buzzed

Inside

See how kite enthusiasts fly along under the power of its electric motor, its wings fluttering against brisk winds.

the power of its electric motor, its wings fluttering against brisk winds.

On the ground, Clemensen used

a radio remote control and began to deftly guide the plane through a series of twists and loops that would have been fit for an air show.

Several minutes passed before he maneuvered the plane back home. After a final approach that was slightly rough, the red glider touched down on the custom-made carpet runway.

"I began doing this as a kid but I couldn't afford it," Clemensen said. "I've always had an inter-

est in it. By day I'm an insurance agent, but I've been with this club for six years now. I wanted an activity I could do with my father."

Clemensen and his 83-year-old father, Bob Clemensen, are two of the more than 60 members of the Las Vegas Soaring Club, which was formed in 1993 and is the largest radio-controlled model sailplane club in Southern Nevada.

Each model airplane can cost anywhere from \$65 to well over \$1,000, and the club features both sailplanes and electric-powered models.

The "electrics" range from helicopters to agile aerobatic planes, while the graceful sailplanes often boast a wingspan of more than 10 feet.

"We've lost planes in the air before," said Bill Winchester, the club's vice president and a resident of Sun City Summerlin. "If you get way high up above the thermal layer, it will just keep going. You really have to keep an eye on it."

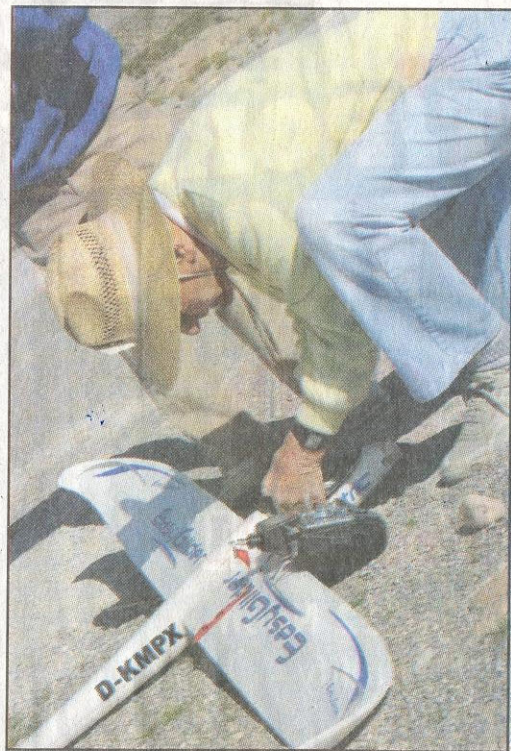
Several members of the club are former pilots themselves, ei-

ther commercially, privately or in the military. The club, which uses a piece of land just west of the 215 Beltway off Charleston Boulevard, has one stipulation: no gas-powered engines.

"The land here belongs to the Desert Sportsman's Rifle & Pistol Club, which is just across the road from us," Clemensen said. "They are a private club and were gracious enough to allow us to use their property as long as there were no chemicals or gas. The electric planes are also much quieter."

On this particular morning of March 22, the Las Vegas Soaring Club's airfield was literally buzzing with activity.

An electric helicopter rose from the landing strip for its morning flight, followed by a Discus Launch Glider, or DLG, which is thrown into the air by hand like a discus. Then, an electric winch propelled a large sailplane — attached to several hundred feet of string — high into the air before the line was cut.



JUMMEL HIDROSOLLO/SPECIAL TO THE HOME NEWS

Tony Giuffrida makes final adjustments before launching his model sailplane at the Las Vegas Soaring Club launch pad.

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Las Vegas Soaring Club flies on gun club's land

Pilots typically receive the completed airframes after making their purchase, but all the electronics and remote control systems have to be in-

stalled by hand.

"People often ask how far these transmitters can work, and the answer is way farther than you can see," Clemensen

said. "Your airplane could be out of sight and you'd still have radio control."

He added that the batteries can run for well over 30 minutes depending on how aggressive you fly. And, of course, there are occasional horror stories of prized gliders crashing into the desert.

"It's part of the hobby, unfortunately," Clemensen said. "But we welcome all ages and skill levels. It doesn't matter if you're a beginner."

The club's youngest member is 13-year-old Ben Storick, while 86-year-old Tony Giuffrida is the most senior pilot.

"And I'm still agile enough to fly," Giuffrida said.

Winchester has been involved in aviation since he was 17, beginning as an aircraft mechanic before moving up to service scheduling and logistics for Pan American World Airways and General Dynamics.

"I've always been interested in aircraft," Winchester said. "I like coming out here and sharing the camaraderie with people. These are deep-down enthusiasts of model airplanes and helicopters, and we all talk the jargon."

The Las Vegas Soaring Club flies every Thursday and Saturday year-round. Flying begins at 9 a.m. during the summer months and 10 a.m. in the winter.

The annual fee is \$25 and a current license with the Academy of Model Aeronautics is required. For more information, visit www.lasvegassoaring.org.

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