

A photograph of two women standing in front of a food stall. The woman on the left is wearing a white AOPA baseball cap and a teal t-shirt with a graphic of a sailboat. The woman on the right is wearing sunglasses, a white polo shirt with a logo, and a dark blue apron. In the foreground, a large griddle is cooking several strips of bacon. In the background, a sign for 'South Carolina' is visible.

Southern Hospitality Shines at the South Carolina Breakfast Club

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By Mike Jones

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It started, as things so often do in this modern age, with a group chat. My friend Karen Ewart had posted a cryptic and existential invitation to our aeronautical crowd, “Anybody flying tomorrow SCBC?” Ewart drives a rocket-powered Cessna 182 and is always looking for an excuse to embarrass those of us in slower machines.

“SCBC” is shorthand for the South Carolina Breakfast Club, a venerable confederation of flyers whose meetings float around the Palmetto State every other Sunday. The SCBC originated in 1938 in Orangeburg, SC. A gentleman named Thomas Summers owned an early Ercoupe — a two-seat, twin-tailed, tricycle-gear, 75-hp, stall-proof aluminum monoplane — and was looking to spend some time with his daughter Sylvia before church. They came up with the idea, endorsed by legions of hungry pilots who would come after them, of flying to breakfast at a different airport every other Sunday. The story goes that when other pilots heard of his plan, they started calling him on Saturday to join him at the proposed destination. Thus the Breakfast Club coalesced into its unusual odyssey: twice a month, every month, since 1938, and always on a Sunday.

A flurry of responses to Ewart's text crashed through the digital ether. Two conclusions emerged: the weather looked superb, and Columbia, SC (KCUB) was manageable in terms of both time and avgas. The usual "life gets in the way" excuses — family conflicts, a nav/com upgrade, a kidney stone — stopped a few pals from participating, but enough thumbs-up emojis littered my screen to encourage me to pull the Centurion out of the barn. Bacon, eggs, and grits were in my future.

An Almost Perfect Flight

I am no devotee of grits, but I am a huge fan of the late aviation writer Richard Collins, who wrote for *Flying Magazine* before it forgot about G.A. and began shilling for companies that make big-budget turbine aircraft. In the 1990s, Collins collected his thoughts on airplanes (mostly enthusiastic) and aviators (mostly disappointed) in a slim volume entitled "The Perfect Flight." Thirty years later Collins' thesis still rings true: while we can never achieve the perfect flight, we should always strive for it. That means thoroughly planning the mission, holding headings and altitudes with exactitude, using radio procedures which are efficient and brisk, working collaboratively with ATC and fellow aviators, and constantly adapting to the unexpected using the combination of expertise and experience that is unique to each pilot. Despite his odd affection for LORAN, the book remains a timeless read.

My flight to Columbia wasn't perfect, but it was close. I delayed my departure to allow two student pilots to meander through the pattern without the distraction of my take-off. I picked up my IFR clearance on the ground and my check-in with Fayetteville was crisp and professional. Hand-flying the entire route, I nailed my altitudes and speeds. When ATC announced a co-altitude aircraft heading to the same destination, I volunteered a lazy 360° turn to allow the conflicting traffic to proceed at their convenience. I even managed the right-hand pattern into KCUB, flying downwind over a huge and distractingly busy railroad yard. I flounced onto the tarmac without the usual Goodyear-burning

bounces that make Clyde Cessna wince in his tomb. I even remembered to thank the controllers who were working without pay during the government shutdown.

There was no confusion about where the fly-in breakfast was happening. Lines and lines of airplanes were jammed on the ramp, parked in front of a yawning hangar housing a slightly dusty B-25. I was marshaled into parking and powered off the avionics and the Continental.

Griddles were hot and the bacon was sizzling. A gaggle of gray-haired gents supervised a dubious-looking pot of grits simmering over a gas flame. A lanky guy in a flannel shirt took my contribution and in a few minutes I was sitting with Ewart and her co-pilot Dr. Rolf Wallin, who had arrived a few minutes ahead of me. Life, we agreed as we splashed hot sauce on our scrambled eggs, was pretty good.



No Rules, No By-Laws

Bearded Stoney Truett, infectiously optimistic, is the current president of the South Carolina Breakfast Club. His “day job” is flight instructing and ferrying airplanes. Most recently, he flew commercial to Altus, OK, squeezed into a diminutive Cessna 120 and somehow brought it back to Walterboro, SC. That’s a long ride in a cramped plane.

“I’m a tailwheel guy; addicted to tailwheels,” he confessed. “My ongoing and everlasting bucket list is to fly as many different airplanes as I can.”

Truett is the master of ceremonies at these semi-monthly events. He



Stoney Truett, President, SCBC

grabbed a microphone to welcome everybody and made a few announcements. He also orchestrated the three contests which have become traditions at SCBC: who flew the greatest distance to be there that morning, who had the worst landing (I kept my hands in my pockets for that one), and who was the youngest participant.

The organization of the breakfast is straightforward. “All we do is bring the people,” Truett said with a smile. “The food is up to the airport that hosts that event. They’re responsible for the venue.”

Munching on my bacon, I counted about 75 people in the hangar and 40 airplanes on the ramp. Truett confirmed this was a medium turnout, but sometimes it is much larger.

“Back in the 1990s in Newberry, SC [the airport] had a bluegrass band and served steak and eggs. We had 160 airplanes arrive in ninety minutes at an

uncontrolled airport,” he reminisced. “We had people coming from all over. One guy came from New York and brought a newspaper with him just to prove he had left that morning.”

The Club claims 8,000 members, which is not as astounding as that might sound given its 87 years of operations. “Basically, it’s all about friendship and good food. There’s no rules, there’s no bylaws, no dues,” Truett explained ungrammatically. “When you come, you’re a member for life. You can’t get kicked out, so once you’re in, you’re in.”

The Museum Venue

The SC Historic Aviation Foundation owns the facility which hosted the breakfast, and its president is Ken Berry, a gregarious local pilot.

“It’s just a natural thing for us to host everybody when the Breakfast Club comes through,” he explained. “We have this hangar, and we already have everything set up.” Berry explained the Museum also uses the hangar as an “event space” for small trade shows, weddings, and corporate meetings. These events raise funds for the restoration of their antique airplanes and the expansion of their offerings. For example, the Museum has just acquired a shiny NA-64 Yale trainer from World War II, which was parked on the ramp during the breakfast.



Ken Berry, museum President, gets breakfast.

Berry was slightly disappointed at the attendance at this breakfast and blamed it on a cold front moving in from the west. “I know that the weather

today kept a few people away, because typically we have almost 100 airplanes at this thing. But it's a beautiful morning right now."

While the museum provided the venue, the local EAA chapter provided the volunteers and handled the cooking. EAA Chapter 242 has 168 members and has been operating since 1965. The chapter is headed by Jim Herpst, a pilot originally from Pittsburgh, PA, who brokers aircraft for a living.

"I love Cessnas, I'm a Cessna guy. My wife runs the FBO here, and she's a Cessna girl," he said with a laugh. "But I'm restoring a Taylorcraft right now, the very plane that I learned to fly in when I was twelve. We're about a year from flying it."



Kristen Booth (left) and Sarah Fisher grilled the bacon at the October SCBC event. Booth is from Columbia and flies a Beechcraft Musketeer. Fisher is a member of the Carolina 99s, and a student pilot at Winnsboro, SC (KFEW). Booth said breakfasts like these are important to her. "It's meeting a lot of people, it's great weather, plus I just love the smell of bacon on the tarmac."

I asked how the Chapter became involved in the breakfast club, and Herpst explained it was part of the mission of their Chapter. "The big, big thing that we want to do is to give back to the community," he said. Herpst explained that in earlier years, the Chapter actually cooked at Breakfast Club events, all over the state.

"We cooked at five of these breakfasts per year. We had what we called 'the meat wagon' we would trailer around the state. But we're all getting older... well, it just became too much. So now we're only doing this one here."

But this Chapter does much more, including the most vigorous Young Eagles program I have found anywhere in the

country. Herpst proudly noted they organize Young Eagles events every month. “We’ve flown almost 12,000 Young Eagles since the inception of the program in 1993.”

While we’re on the subject of volunteer chefs, we need to digress into the rarified subject of hot breakfast cereals. I’m a New Englander, born and bred, and oatmeal porridge is the cooked cereal of choice in my home all winter long. Under the best of circumstances, grits are problematic for this Yankee. Have you ever noticed when people talk about grits, they usually spotlight the ingredients they add to them? Brown sugar? Butter? Cheese? Shrimp? Ketchup? I would assert nothing qualifies as a real food if the only way to eat it is to slather it with something else.

Anyhow, South Carolina is deep deep Deep South, so grits were on the menu. How did the volunteers do? Not my favorite, would be the verdict. Longtime pilot and grits-master Lee Myers, a southern gentleman if there ever was one, introduced me to “real” grits at the Cessnas-to-Oshkosh base camp in the North Forty at AirVenture long ago. He’s made the grits there for years, maybe decades. The best grits require high-quality stone-ground corn. They are cooked slowly, even tediously, constantly whisking to avoid lumps until the mixture is tender and creamy. Lee’s Oshkosh grits are hearty pilot-food; they’ll hold a spoon straight up. At Columbia? Well, maybe I should concede I just can’t do grits. My bad.

Signing the Soccer Ball

Paul Merz is the retired Navy submariner who won the honor of the “bounced landing” soccer ball in honor of his shaky arrival at the breakfast. But Merz has an excuse: he’s just a student pilot. In fact, he and his instructor flew to the SCBC breakfast in the same Cessna 172 Merz used for his training and solo flights. He started flight training in August of last year but had “a little blip

with cancer” early in the 2025. He recovered from that set-back and now has just passed his written exam.

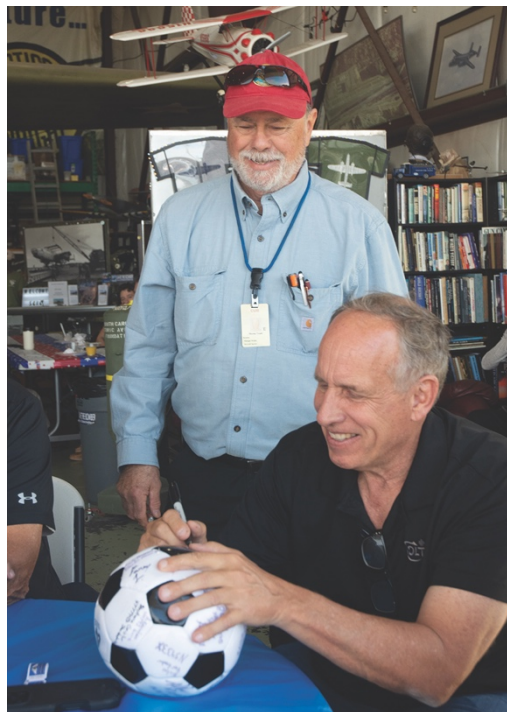
“I came out the other side [of the cancer] and passed my written with an 85,” he announced proudly. “Hopefully next is my check ride and I’ll finish my private. When I’m done, I want to buy a Cessna 182.” Smart man.

Truett reported the SCBC has gone through seven or eight soccer balls since the award was first introduced.

Merz was flying with his instructor, Chris Corbett, who confirmed that Merz is ready for his check ride. Corbett himself became interested in flying because he is in construction, and flying is very helpful to look at jobs, to fly for fun, and for travel. The SCBC breakfast is a good example of why they fly: “Just to meet the people, and enjoy the fellowship and camaraderie,” he said. Notice nobody mentioned the grits.

Paul and Loren Lockyer currently live in Lexington, SC, having moved to the region from Australia. Paul is a material science engineer who designs parts for automotive and aerospace applications; Loren’s background is in graphic design for websites and marketing materials. Their daughters are Isabelle, and Zoe, ages 5 and 2, and it was Zoe who won the prize. They came to the breakfast because of Paul’s long-term fascination with airplanes.

“I was flying when I was younger, but didn’t really pursue it,” Paul explained. “Now I want to get back into it. I also want to expose my daughters to the opportunities in aviation.” Loren was particularly y impressed with the B-25 bomber the museum has been renovating. “It’s all very interesting,” she said,



Paul Merz, winner of the “Bounced Landing” contest

bemused by her husband and her daughters. “It’s a very different world from what I know.”

Wait until she tries the grits.

Heading Home

The morning wound down as the sky grew more gray; the cold front that Ken Berry had detected in the forecast was indeed trudging eastward. The bright sun faded behind high clouds and the winds morphed from benign to sporty. Gradually the pilots and their passengers wandered back to their planes and, one by one, climbed into the sky. I kicked-started the old Centurion and headed down to Hilton Head Island for a couple days of golf with a friend. But the mellow delight of that cordial breakfast has stayed with me all week. Nice people, handsome airport, well-flown airplanes, lively conversation, and a few hearty chuckles make for good memories. As has so often said before, we get into aviation for the adventure but we stay in aviation for the people.

The grits? Not so much.



The Lockyer family, recently moved to South Carolina from Australia, came to the breakfast “just for the adventure.” (L-R) Paul and Loren, with Isabelle and Zoe. Little Zoe, in the blue hat, was acknowledged as the youngest participant in this particular event. They are posed in front of the Museum’s newest acquisition, an NA-64 Yale trainer which served in World War II.

About the Author



Dr. Mike Jones is a 4,000 hour commercial-rated pilot who takes both his Cessna Centurion and his light sport taildragger to grass runways whenever he can find them. His day job is consulting with small airports to improve their performance and profitability. You always can reach him at PilotMike2012@gmail.com.