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Published January 19th, 2022

Lafayette man heads international body of Rotarian pilots

Submitted by Thomas Black



George Chaffey with his vintage aircraft. Photo provided

George Chaffey, a longtime resident of Lafayette and a longtime Rotarian, is currently serving as World President of the International Fellowship of Flying Rotarians.

He is one of two remaining charter members of Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary, and is a past governor of Rotary District 5160, which embraces 72 clubs in northern California.

Chaffey's two-year term as World President was highlighted last year by an adventurous 12,000-mile solo journey that hopscotched him about the lower 48 states in his prized 1948 Luscombe plane. He purchased the single-prop, single-wing model 50 years ago, shortly after earning his private pilot license.

His westernmost touchdown was in Quillayute, Wash.; northernmost in Piney Pinecreek, Minn., along the

Canada border; southernmost in Key West, Fla., and easternmost in Eastport, Maine.

Because there is no supplemental oxygen on board, Chaffey rarely flies higher than 12,000 feet, and is prohibited by FAA regulation from exceeding 14,000 feet.

He generally flies between 8,000 and 10,000 feet, as this, he learned, is the most fuel-friendly altitude. As for speed, it is generally in the range of 100 mph.

He says his chief role as leader of the 1,200-member organization is as a goodwill ambassador, "buzzing about like a honeybee" to attend IFFR meetings in different regions of the world.

Have there been any close calls? "Knock on wood, no," said Chaffey. "No serious mechanical issues. The main nemesis is weather. If the forecast bodes ill, I stay on terra firma." The plane, named Lady Bird, is hangered at Buchanan airfield in Concord.

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