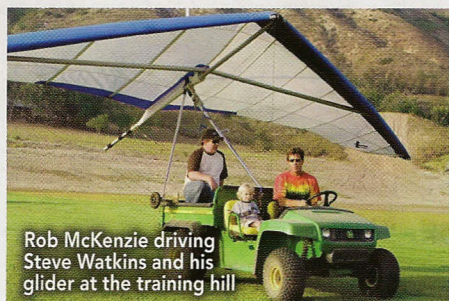


# Taking Initiative

*By Rob McKenzie, with Alan Crouse and Ken Howells  
Photos by Julie Hayes*

Heather Reid at the training hill

August 2007: Hang Gliding & Paragliding – [www.usHPA.aero](http://www.usHPA.aero)



Rob McKenzie driving Steve Watkins and his glider at the training hill

## An Uncertain Future

My wife Dianne and I recently had the privilege and honor of driving the Wills Wing truck across the country from California to Florida for the annual Wills Wing party and demo days at Wallaby Ranch. Present at this gathering was, as usual, a sampling of the wealth of friends and family that we collectively have in our sport.

To help pass the time on the road, a close friend had loaned me a book entitled *Death by Black Hole*. Perhaps as the direct influence of this reading material, I spent some time thinking about our ongoing concern for the future of hang gliding and paragliding. (For the rest of the article I'll say "hang" gliding, but I intend it to affectionately mean both sports.) In

the black hole book is a description of the theoretical singularity where everything is shrunk to zero size. Could this be the future of hang gliding? Surely with all the energy we have in our flying population we will not just evaporate or collapse into oblivion. Just say it ain't so!

I have faith. I truly believe that we have within our group the resources to forge a long-lasting stand. We have spent the last three decades creating equipment and training methods. Not to take away from these efforts, but I propose that we must now direct our attention to the biggest hurdle of all: securing flying sites. In some places where population has already encroached we have already seen this fight taking place, with mixed results. The following is a description of how individual initiative and help from a national foundation combined to give the Andy Jackson Airpark in San Bernardino, California, a more secure future.

## An Airpark is Born

Let me give a brief history of the site. From the ashes of a city ban on hang gliding in San Bernardino in 1977, came two local heroes – Andy Jackson and

his wife Juanita. They purchased a small tract of land within city limits and, despite the ordinance banning flying, Pine Crest Air Park was established. Within the next 10 years, Andy died of prostate cancer; Juanita persevered and then the State of California descended onto the park to obtain it for expansion of a hydroelectric project.

Pilots banded together and, with Juanita's endorsement, we found ourselves the recipients of a custom-made LZ. The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) spent a lot of money (half a million) providing a place for us that, as it turns out, is better than our original LZ. Lobbying a government agency is like pushing a freight train. When it's not moving or is going the wrong direction it is very tough to change. But if it's going the direction you like, eventually you reach your goal. All you need is patience. The lobbying effort to get this LZ took nearly five years and could be the basis of entire book all in itself.

## The Plot Thickens

Fast-forward 12 years to 2005. The



The training hill under construction

land under our approach apron in the prevailing wind is owned by a couple of different landowners. One part is in what we suddenly discover is a proposed housing development, and the other is a single-house tract, which has had this one house on it since the creation of the LZ. Like a double sonic boom, in a short period of time we are told of the impending housing development and also that the single-house tract is up for sale. The developer has a bid in on this single-house tract, to add to his development. Two local pilots, Owen Morse and Len Szafaryn, purchase the single-house tract to prevent the developer from holding all the cards.

One of the toughest decisions I have had to make is whether or not to rally up a war against the developer. Such a war would likely lead to a second war against the DWR, which would risk a complete reversal of the DWR's decision to provide us a replacement LZ. When you blow up a balloon and tie it off, you never know if another breath could have been pushed into it without bursting the balloon. As much as I believe we are secure to keep what the DWR made for us in



Ken Westfall launching from the training hill

1993, I am not so sure about starting the whole process up to have the DWR take on substantial additional expense on our behalf. That freight train has long since stopped moving.

The alternative to war would be to negotiate an agreement with the developer, keeping the lawyers and DWR out of the

mix-up. As we got down to details, it appeared that the developer was willing to sacrifice eight premium lots, which he would count as part of his "open space" requirement. From this we would get a





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Heading up for another flight

base and final approach over open area. We in turn would be losing the open space under our downwind leg. Since a modified figure-8 approach could allow safe landings, I opted to make the concessions. Details of these negotiations also allowed us to obtain a non-exclusive easement on a southwest-facing training slope under the final approach and for the LZ to be provided with stub outs for full utilities, namely water, gas and sewer.

### For Better or Worse

The new training hill is partly on the single-house lot, so it is only of value if that property remains secured. Now, Owen and Len are not unintelligent chaps to say the least, so it was with huge heart, more than head, that they generously purchased this part of our approach. They are losing about \$1500 a month, which is the difference between their cost and the rental income.

I asked Len what their intent was.

They would like some assistance with the losses and to see that the property would improve the flying site. Their land is officially named the "Cross-Country Ranch." Len said they would give it three years and if what they saw was status quo, they would probably sell the property and let the new owner (whoever that may be) build what they would on it. There is the potential and probability that this property, if developed, would severely limit the types of approaches available, resulting in the LZ becoming only suitable for paragliders and low-performance hang gliders.

So "status quo" is not an option with a future. We would either see improvements or a potentially huge negative impact on the site. The tough got going. We considered raising the \$530,000 to buy the ranch from Owen and Len. Our first estimate only showed an ability to raise a bit under \$200,000. So the next option was chosen by our membership:

We would offer \$500 a month to the ranch for access and water, leaving Len and Owen each about \$500 a month in losses. Improvements were focused upon. We now had the opportunity to physically combine the original LZ acreage into the many acres of the newly acquired approach apron. We could open up the new training slope. And there was a natural shape to the ranch that allowed a second training hill, this one facing south. Perhaps most important of all was the presence of year-round spring water. There is enough water to likely allow watering the entire LZ. Wow! But we needed a way to inexpensively do all these projects. We needed a landscape tractor. Renting would be prohibitive.

*The next step in the "long story" – the tale of how CSS and Gracie-the-tractor accomplished the seeming impossible – can be found on the CSS Web site, [www.crestlinesoaring.org](http://www.crestlinesoaring.org). The shortened version (edited to fit into this magazine) continues here.*

### Enter the Foundation for Free Flight

If you are lucky enough to be obsessed (or is it "unlucky" enough?) with your local flying site and you decide you want to give back to hang gliding, then you will no doubt find obvious local vehicles through which to direct your assistance. If, however, you are among the majority of pilots who have many flying sites that you frequent and your embrace is with the sport as a whole, then please consider



Folding up in the LZ



The huge landing field is a great place to practice kiting.

helping through donations to the Foundation for Free Flight. The trustees of this 501(c)(3) organization are perhaps the most respected and trusted members of our flying community. Their goal is to help secure the future of flying in all parts of our country. I direct you to visit their Web site at <http://www.ushgf.org>. (See also Mark Forbes's sidebar to this article.)

The Foundation generously provided 50% of the funds for the CSS to purchase its tractor. Their \$9000 went a long way toward making our site improvements possible. I don't plug the Foundation simply because they helped us out. Instead I am using their donation to CSS as an example of how the Foundation is there to help all of our flying sites.

#### Where There's a Will There's a Way

Please excuse the low-budget pun – the message is intended to be made with high-budget clarity. I prefer the old expression, "charity begins at home." Take care of yourself and your spouse and children. After that, please consider the sport of hang gliding as part of your extended family.

A vehicle available for you to accomplish this is the "revocable living trust." A Google of this will provide plenty of information.

#### Consider Becoming a 501(c)(3)

One of the other key initiatives we undertook was to become recognized as a tax-exempt charity under section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code. This exercise started with several strikes against it and required almost two years of effort, and the support of every club member. Much of the task involved correcting or completing well-intentioned efforts from the past, and a new organization starting from scratch would find the process much simpler. Having persevered, the CSS has proper standing at both the state and federal levels. Our club does not pay taxes to either government, and best of all, it can accept donations and provide charitable donation receipts for goods, services and cash received to further our mission.

#### Being Worthy

Working to save a flying site is something that begins with the local flying population. You should not expect that waving a flag to draw attention to your need will bring help running. You need to show initiative and begin the process yourself. Large groups are much more likely to provide assistance if the local flying population is showing that they are willing to take direct action with personal risk and sacrifice.

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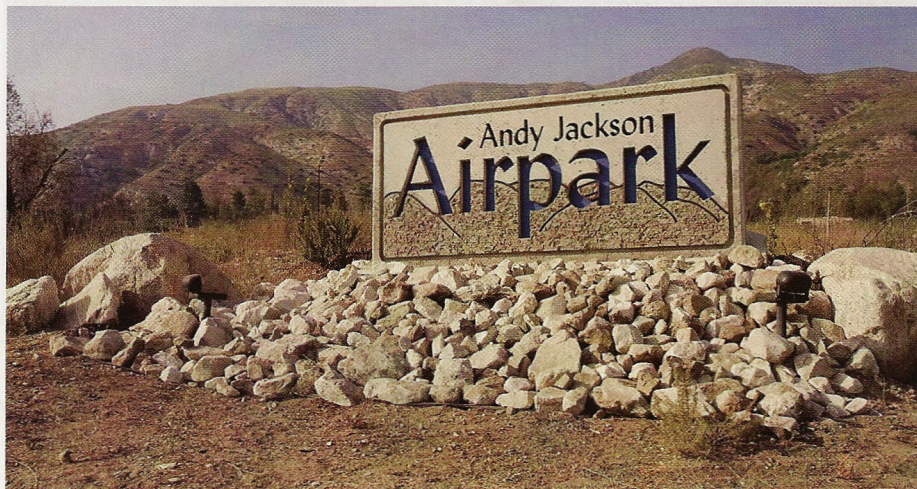
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## Looking Forward

The future is never fully secure, but Andy Jackson Airpark is thriving and improving. We have a working agreement with the developers to our east, tremendous support from the pilots owning the property to the north, and the loader procured with support from the Foundation for Free Flight. Improvements are already showing results with a new training hill in place, an expanded landing area, and new grass filling in, fed by an expanded irrigation system. The pilots are busy installing a new on-site storage locker for their wings. The first 30 years of hang gliding have seen exciting improvements in our sport; we look forward to enjoying the next 30 years of hang gliding improvements over the skies of Andy Jackson Airpark.

## You want to buy a WHAT? Or, How Your Contributions Allowed the Foundation to Support the Crestline Tractor Project

By Mark Forbes, trustee, Foundation for Free Flight, <http://www.ushgf.org/>

When the Crestline Soaring Society first approached the Foundation for a grant to fund the tractor purchase, we had to give it some serious thought. Was this really a "site preservation" project? As we learned more about it, we decided that it certainly was, and in fact it was a smart move by the club to accomplish their long-term goals for the site at minimum cost. With strong support from local pilots who made



Gene Embree driving Gracie

generous donations to the project, the Foundation put up \$9000 in site-preservation grant money to match their contributions, and made "Gracie" a reality.

The vision and dedication of Rob, Dianne, Owen, Len and all the Crestline pilots give us a great example of how a site can be saved and enhanced by working together. On a larger scale, the Foundation provides pilots throughout the country a way to work together, and even save some money on their taxes.

The Foundation for Free Flight (new name for the U.S. Hang Gliding Foundation) is a 501(c)(3) registered charity, and contributions are tax-deductible under the IRS rules. What this means to you is that every dollar you donate really only costs you about 65 cents, depending on your tax bracket. You can specify what your donation should support if you choose to, or you can direct it to the general fund, which is used to support all three of

the Foundation's core purposes: site preservation, safety and education, and competition.

With contributions from pilots just like you, the Foundation has helped fund worthy projects that preserve sites like the Andy Jackson Airpark, Point of the Mountain and Henson's Gap. Your contributions help out the competition teams with part of their entry fees for World Championship meets, and fund efforts to develop and promote new training methods like scooter towing. It all starts with pilot contributions, though, and your support is essential to our collective success.

The bulk of the Foundation's donations and grants go toward site preservation projects. As development continues to consume open space, our flying sites become ever more expensive and harder to keep open. Many of our favorite sites are just one sale away from becoming tract houses or shopping malls. As

land prices increase, it becomes harder for landowners to resist the big payoff of a sale, rather than keeping the land open for pasture, wildlife habitat or fliers like us. We must act now, while we can still afford it, to preserve these precious sites through purchases, long-term leases or easements. Your donations to the Foundation make this possible.

Like the pilots at Crestline, we need to be thinking ahead and planning now for the future. By the time the "For Sale" signs go up, it's usually too late to do more than cry as yet another site is covered with buildings. Your tax-deductible donations today will help to insure our ability to fly free for years into the future.

