

The earth is made of land, water, and air. Early human activity, including sports, was restricted to the land. A few thousand years ago humans ventured into the water for sport and other activities. Only in the last hundred years have humans been capable of winged flight. But individual human flight has been so difficult and expensive that few people were able to do it for fun or sport prior to the introduction of simple and inexpensive flexible wings. In the last twenty years people all over the world have learned to fly hang gliders. Now there are regional, national, and world hang glider competitions, and hang gliding will soon be an Olympic Sport.

It must have taken some courage for the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame to consider hang gliding worthy of inclusion with traditional sports like football, baseball, basketball, and golf. But what state is more qualified to do it than North Carolina, the "land of beginnings", the "first in flight"?

The Wright Brothers came to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina at the beginning of this century to initiate the age of human flight with man made wings. In the early 1960s Thomas H. Purcell Jr. of Raleigh, after reading NASA reports, built and flew a flexible wing glider that was auto-towed at the Raleigh-Durham Airport. It was the first flex-wing glider to be flown by an astronaut, Milt Thompson. Later Purcell mounted his glider on floats and demonstrated it at the NASA Langley Research Center, where I had the privilege of flying it. That was my first solo flight.

In the mid 60s I was privileged to see the Golden Knights at Fort Bragg, North Carolina become the first people to jump from aircraft and deploy flexible wings. Now sports parachutists the world over are using flexible wings instead of conventional parachutes in order to achieve controlled glide and soft landings. In 1967 Gertrude and I bought a cottage in Kitty Hawk where we could fly our home-built flexible wings on the beach, on Jockey's Ridge, and by boat-tow on

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the sounds.

In 1973 Vic Powell organized the first annual hang gliding meet at Jockey's Ridge. It attracted pilots from many parts of the United States. Number fifteen begins May 8th. Soon after that 1973 meet John Harris and his associates at Kitty Hawk Kites began teaching hang gliding at Jockey's Ridge and have since taught about 80,000 people to fly. John Harris also demonstrated hang gliding at Grandfather Mountain where that activity including the prestigious Masters Championships has continued to the present.

At Jockey's Ridge pilots have soared for as long as five hours. One climbed to over a thousand feet in a thermal, and then flew about four miles to the old Coast Guard Station near the Wright Memorial. That flight led to the establishment of a prize for the first pilot to fly a hang glider from Jockey's Ridge to the Wright Monument and back to Jockey's Ridge. This prize is administered by the First Flight Society, which also sponsors the annual Wright Fly-In in April and the First Flight Anniversary in December. Their theme for 1987 is North Carolina Aviators, who will be honored at the December 17th celebration. A list of North Carolina's contributions to aviation should include the pioneering work of Fessenden in wireless communication, without which many air and space flights would have been impossible.

Modern hang gliding is the nearest that humans have come to flying like soaring birds. Although it can be done individually, it seems to bring people together in friendship. I hope that some day all the people of the earth will have the freedom to fly together in peace and friendship. This is a goal worth striving for.

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The hang gliding activities of Otto Lillienthal in Germany at the end of the last century inspired the Wright brothers to develop their gliders and powered airplane at Kitty Hawk North Carolina at the beginning of this century. Their powered airplane changed the world, but hang gliding languished until about twenty years ago when people in several nations began to take a renewed interest in this simple and inexpensive method of human flight. This new interest spread and flourished worldwide to such an extent that hang gliding is expected to become an Olympic Sport in the near future --- the first flying sport to take its place beside all of the Olympic Sports on land and on the water.

Modern hang gliding is the nearest that humans have come to flying like birds. Although it can be done individually, it seems to bring people together in friendship. I hope I live to see the day when all the peoples of the earth have the freedom to fly together in peace and friendship. This is a goal worth striving for.

Hundreds of people have contributed to this advancement of the science and sport of hang gliding, and tonight I feel greatly honored to represent all of those people by being inducted into the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame.