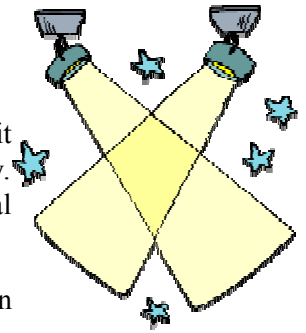


Member Spotlight

This month the Member Spotlight is on Ross and Machell Wheeler. Ross's work schedule makes it so he cannot attend many meetings, but we are glad to have him and Machell as members anyway. Both Ross and Machell are Augusta natives, being born and raised here. They met through mutual friends in high school. They were married on March 5, 2001, in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Machell works for the Columbia County Board of Education as a Special Education Paraprofessional. She works at Evans Elementary with third and fourth graders who struggle with Emotional Behavior Disorder. Ross works for a General Contracting Construction Company as a Project Manager/Estimator. Projects are for the US Government, County/State, and private sector. The projects are competitively awarded contracts primarily located on military bases. Some of the current projects now include hospital interior renovation and waste water infrastructure.



Ross has been fascinated with flying for as long as he can remember. He became interested in homebuilding when he realized how affordable it could be. It all started at an air show with a really simple Bensen style single place gyroplane that was on display. Ross realized that he could build a similar machine for just a few thousand dollars. Ross first found a gyroplane CFI to go to and do an intro flight, just to see if gyro flying was for him. Machell also took an intro flight that day and was just as hooked if not more than Ross, so the single place machine was now out of the equation. This is what led them to buying a RAF 2000. Ross' first flight in a small aircraft was with Perry Barinowski about 10 years ago. He found it to be a blast! He had flown commercially before and on tourist flights.

Ross is working for his Sport Pilot license (gyroplane). He has 25 hours in the RAF 2000 gyroplane. He also has 10 hours in a C-152 and 3 hours in an R-22 helicopter. His favorite aircraft that he has flown to date is the R-22. He has always found helicopters to be most intriguing for their complexity and versatility. Ross' favorite thing to do is fly low and slow. That is why he likes the RAF 2000 that he now owns. Unfortunately he has had quite a number of minor problems, but he appreciates the fact that he has learned a lot more about his aircraft while fixing these issues. If he could have any aircraft possible, Ross would choose the Pitcairn PA-18 AutoGyro.



Besides flying, both Ross and Machell enjoy whitewater kayaking and camping. They like the outdoors and spend a lot of time exploring the Appalachian mountains. If they were to choose a favorite it would be the Chattooga River area in north east Georgia.

Perhaps Ross missed his calling as a teacher. In his own words, "I really enjoy teaching things that I am passionate about. Just sharing the knowledge that I have gained through experience. It could be teaching techniques and



safety in Civil & Utility construction to as simple as telling someone how my gyroplane flies. Teaching whitewater kayaking techniques and swift water rescue/safety has been a long time passion as well. I truly hope to gain enough experience with a gyroplane and get a CFI rating to combine the two things I am really passionate about, flying and teaching."

We look forward to Ross getting his Sport Pilot's license and attending our meetings in his gyroplane.