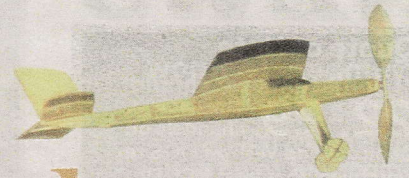


HOBBY

# Club harkens back to Golden Age of Flight



By Adam Zewe  
azewe@communitypub.com

The canary yellow airplane glides in a smooth circle, picking up speed as it gently dips its nose and begins its descent.

But there's no runway in sight.

The plane, a model powered solely by a lone rubber band, is coming in to land on the floor of the gymnasium inside the Hockessin Police Athletic League.

It's an example of indoor freeflight model airplane flying, a pastime made popular in the 1930s during the Golden Age of Flight and resurrected today by a group of Hockessin enthusiasts.

They call it freeflight because the pilot has no control over the plane once it takes off, explained Newt Bollinger of Little Falls Village.

Each airplane, painstakingly built from balsa wood and tissue paper, is powered by a propeller that is attached to a tightly coiled rubber band that unwinds to spin the propeller and move the plane, he said.

But a pilot must prepare the plane to fly a certain way before it takes off in a process called trimming, explained Hockessin resident Eric Teder.

Trimming involves twisting, turning or bending the plane's wings, tail and rudder so that it flies in a circle once it's released in the air, he said.

"It's really all experimentation," Teder said. "A lot of people in this are engineering types who have a lot of fun trying to solve problems."

Trim a plane the wrong way and it'll crash into the ground shortly after takeoff or soar too high into the air so it stalls, he said.

But he said there is another element to freeflying that makes the hobby challenging — the motor.

Instead of being powered by a pair of double A batteries, these planes fly by rubber band, so making sure that band is the proper length and width is vital to an airplane's flying time, he said.

Pilots use a device that resembles a miniature spaghetti maker to grind rubber strips into thinner pieces, Teder said. The number of winds determines how long the plane will fly, he said — unless it smacks into the wall mid-flight.

For an average one-minute flight inside the gym, the band must be wound 1,500 to 1,800 times, Bollinger said. But he uses a special tool with a crank that

## IF YOU GO

### Indoor Freeflight Demonstration

**WHAT** Expert flyers will show and explain freeflight model airplanes

**WHEN** Thursday, Jan. 28 from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**WHERE** Hockessin Police Athletic League, 7259 Lancaster Pike, Hockessin

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** call 302-239-8861

counts the number of winds, instead of twisting it each time with his fingers.

"The guys who fly for an hour are real scientists about it," Teder said.

There's also science involved in building the planes, he said. They must be extremely light to fly, Teder said, and some of the planes they use weigh less than 4 grams (there are 28 grams in an ounce).

To build it light, each piece of balsa wood must be cut thin and a builder must use as little glue as possible, he said.

"When you're trying to build an airplane that weighs a gram and a half, glue is heavy," he said.

However, the challenge of building light planes also makes freeflying a cheap hobby, Bollinger said. An average plane uses less than a dollar's worth of materials.

It takes a love of aerodynamics, an understanding of physics and a fair amount of patience to enjoy freeflight as a hobby, Bollinger said. He was first interested in the hobby as a child in the 1930s when he built planes out of sticks

and tissue paper, but without much success, he said.

He picked the hobby up again 60 years later while living in Florida.

For Teder, flight has always been an interest — from the time he built plastic airplane models as a child to today, when he is an international pilot for Continental Airlines.

And though flying a quarter-ounce freeflight plane is starkly different from piloting a 646,000-pound Boeing 777, seeing the model circling the ceiling is just as rewarding, he said.

"There's something magical about a rubber band model flying in a circle with no other input," Teder said. "There's something old world about it."



**TOP PLANE:** A freeflight model plane soars near the rafters of the gym. **ABOVE:** Newt Bollinger, of Little Falls Village, winds a rubber band that will power his yellow freeflight model. **LEFT:** For a flight inside the gym, a plane's motor is typically wound 1,500 to 1,800 times. ADAM ZEWE PHOTOS