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Ten Miles Out

by Mike Ely and Linda Street-Ely

Critters Lodge is a private aviation preserve in the rolling hills of East Texas, and a long-standing host locale for spring and fall fly-ins. Follow Highway 7 between Crockett and Centerville. From the intersection of the Trinity River and Highway 7, Dillard Airport, better known as Critters Lodge, is 6.5 miles west. Look for the 499-foot tower on the right side. Turn south and fly one-half nautical mile.



Bev and Wendell have been welcoming guests to their spacious estate for two decades. Now both retirees, they devote their time to maintaining a lighted, 3,100-foot-long packed turf runway, clean and comfortable restroom facilities, dozens of camp-by-your plane parking spots, and a mammoth hangar outfitted with long picnic tables and a full commercial kitchen set up inside. Plus, Wendell's Beechcraft Baron. It's the place where aviation friends gather to enjoy a somewhat rustic setting, with camaraderie unsurpassed, thanks to our host and hostess.

and dinner, with just a jar at the end of the serving line. Pay what you will. Brisket is mouthwatering, side dishes scrumptious, and desserts...well, let's just say moderation tends to be postponed.

We normally fly up with our tent, cooler, and camping gear, and settle into our usual spot off the runway in the southeast corner. Wendell runs a tight, safety-first operation. No nonsense, no exceptions. Every time we've visited, we're welcomed on the radio as soon as we announce 10 miles out. Dale, Wendell's trusted "air traffic controller," would radio back with the status of the runway; it was clear, or someone was on final, or someone was about to take off. All for situational awareness. Then we'd land, and there'd be Dale with his 1947 military Jeep and Wendell in a utility cart, a Mule or

something, waving us along to follow him to our parking place. "Welcome back! So glad you came! Proud to have you here!" Wendell always says.

But this Spring fly-in, things were different. Dale passed away in September, and this fly-in was a memorial gathering for the man who was Wendell's right hand, who helped keep things running safely and smoothly. And was always there when we called ten miles out.

There was still brisket and fixin's and more than enough sugary sweets to go around. But there was no camping this time. Just a single day set aside to remember and honor one of the most friendly and genuine men we've ever met.

We're all getting older. Every minute. But it's still hard to lose sight of dear friends, even the ones you might only see twice a year. Dale was part of the arrival. Part of the heartbeat. Part of the place. This time, ten miles out, another voice answered the radio doing exactly what needed to be done. But it wasn't Dale.

Still, the fly-in was on, just the way he would have wanted.

ElyAirLines.substack.com

FASOLT receives lovely thank-you from scholarship recipient

FASOLT (Fine Arts Society of Liberty, Texas) recently received this wonderful letter from Ellie Hale, an outstanding, talented young lady, and FASOLT scholarship recipient. She is the daughter of Reverend Josh Hale. Ellie has performed around Liberty many times, and is doing a great job in college. This is one of the nicest letters I have ever received from a student. We wish her well!

Jim Sterling
Founder & Past President, FASOLT

FASOLT Board and Members, Hello! I hope this letter finds you all well, and for those of you who are teaching currently, I hope you survive the end of the school year in one piece.

I'm writing to you today to say thank you for all of your support while I was in high school, which in turn, enabled me to be well prepared when starting college this year. I have many peers who did not have the same community support in their schools and programs at home, so the more I look back, the more grateful I become. I have written countless scholarship applications and personal essays about my life and relationship to music, and while the specific subjects vary, I repeatedly find myself talking about how strongly supported the fine arts are in Liberty, and how unusual that is for such a small town.

I am also continually appreciative for receiving a FASOLT scholarship for this past school year, as it has helped me to focus on my studies and fully participate in all of the workings of the school of music here at Stephen F. Austin State University. Throughout the past school-year, I have performed in seven

concerts: three with the treble choir, two with the university concert band, and two masterworks with the combined SFA choirs and orchestra. I also participated in the spring opera production of Strauss' Die Fledermaus, singing in the chorus, and I competed at the Texoma NATS regional conference, advancing to the semi-final round of auditions. I've maintained a semester on the president's list and will hopefully remain on it at the con-

clusion of this semester. I'm incredibly excited to continue to learn and grow as a musician and as a teacher in the next few years.

I hope that by telling you just a little bit about my year, it shows how much of a difference support from organizations like FASOLT makes on students like me.

Thank you,
Ellie Hale
April 25, 2026

LISD Education Foundation

Continued from Page A-1

that go beyond traditional classroom resources.

For more information about the Liberty ISD Education Foundation or to learn how to support its mission, please contact the Foundation or visit the social media pages.

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