

Ely Air Lines –

She Was ‘The Dakota Flyer’

A Woman in Her Element

by Mike Ely and Linda Street-Ely

Linda: Last week, I shared my amazement upon learning of Geneva Schow Oleson. But I have more to say.

Before she made her mark on aviation, she tried a few other occupations. She attended nursing school in Bismarck, but her first job convinced her rather quickly that nursing was not for her. Then she taught at a country school. A group of adolescent boys decided a new teacher presented an opportunity to see what they could get away with. Geneva had another idea. She took them target shooting, and she hit the bullseye every time.

That settled that. The boys were so impressed that discipline ceased to be a problem.

But Geneva’s real calling had been waiting all along. Her father, Martin C. Schow, had taught her to fly, and eventually aviation won.

Her daughter, Kari Burkhart, told me she grew up hearing stories about her mother working at the Mott airport, fueling airplanes and doing what-



ever else needed doing. That was where Geneva met Kari’s father. He had heard there was a pretty girl at the airport who was also a pilot. Apparently, that was sufficient reason to fly over and investigate. He arrived with his Golden Labrador Retriever and didn’t wait long to propose.

Geneva became one of aviation’s greatest promoters in the region. She believed every town ought to have an airport and every farmer should carve out a grass strip. She campaigned for municipal and county airports to offer courtesy cars, food and pilot lounges. Out in the country, she knew pilots could depend on hospitality; land on a farm when circumstances required it, she said, and chances were somebody would invite you in for coffee – and probably feed you, too.

Before Kari was born, Geneva founded The Dakota Flyer, an aviation magazine in the late 1940’s throughout North & South Dakota, Minnesota and Montana. She flew with other pilots to gather their stories and

from place to place soliciting advertising. Long before websites and social media connected pilots instantly, Geneva was flying around four states doing it herself.

The public loved their aviatrix, too. Once, organizers of a North Dakota parade and asked Geneva to participate – with her airplane.

Life eventually took Geneva and her family to California. But after her husband was killed in an airplane accident, she returned with her children to North Dakota and stepped away from flying for a short time.

But airplanes called her back. After time away, and after such a loss, Geneva flew initially with an instructor. Then in 1971, she and good friend Audrey L. Baird entered the Powder Puff Derby as a team, racing a Cessna 182 from Calgary, Alberta, to Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Geneva Schow Oleson was back.

I love that about her. Flying was so much more than something she did. Again and again, it was where she belonged.

In 2013, the aviation community recognized Geneva’s contributions by selecting her as the first woman inducted into the North Dakota Aviation Hall of Fame.

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Chrome, Crafts, Catfish in Cleveland on Saturday

CLEVELAND - It’s a car show, a craft show, fish fry and more when Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo Houston Metro Go Texan Committee Liberty County Subcommittee presents Chrome, Crafts and Catfish, all in one day, Saturday, Oct. 3, at Cleveland’s VFW Post 5 p.m.

Drive your ride on over and enter the classic car show. Entry is \$25 (\$0 FMV). Registration is open from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Those that want to show off their creative side can rent a craft space for \$40. (\$0 FMV). Spaces are 12x12.

Don’t worry about lunch, just bring an appetite and enjoy a fish and

chips plate. Each plate includes three pieces of fish with french fries for just \$15 (\$7.50 FMV). Serving is from 12-4 p.m.

A live auction will take place 2:30 p.m. with numerous items to bid on. A silent auction will also be held with bidding closing at 3:30 p.m. Drinks will be available for purchase but ice chests/coolers are prohibited. An awards ceremony will follow the auction.

Proceeds benefit the scholarship program. In 2025, \$160,000 in scholarships were awarded to Liberty County seniors.

For more information, contact Dawn Sarver at 281-703-7562 or hmglib-

erty county@gmail.com. VFW Post 1839 is located at 18 CR 396, Cleveland.

4-H ANNUAL PECAN SALE FUNDRAISER

LIBERTY - Good for snacking or holiday baking, either way, Liberty County 4-H has begun its annual 4-H Pecan Sale fundraiser. The pecans come shelled in one-pound bags and can be purchased for \$12. Choose pieces or halves. Contact your local 4-H Clubs: 4-H Hot Shots, Dayton 4-H, Dolen 4-H, Forever 4-H, Hardin 4-H, Hope 4-H, Plum Grove 4-H, Tarkington 4-H, Trinity Trailblazer 4-H or contact the Liberty County Extension Office at 936-334-3230. Proceeds from sales will support the 4-H program.

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