

MEMBER OF THE MONTH – September, 2008 by Sheila Connell

Gerald M. Ballard, born sometime in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (He threatened this author's life if the birth date was printed!), and spent his formative years in the state of Virginia. An entrepreneur by design, he began his first job at the tender age of 10 years! The job could have much to do with where he is today insofar as his aviation interests and achievements. How? His first attempt at making a dollar was pumping gas at Shannon AIRPORT in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

The Ballard family moved to Augusta, GA, in 1951 for work at the Bomb Plant. Gerald was only 12 years old at the time - oops!, now YOU figure the birth date! After graduating from Hephzibah High School, Gerald enlisted in the Air Force and was assigned to Amarillo, Texas. There he attended school to become an aircraft mechanic. He was later shipped to Tripoli, Libya, for 730 days where he was crew chief on F100's, 105's, 101's and 102's. Subsequent to that assignment, he was transferred to Moody AFB in Valdosta, Georgia, where he was crew chief on T-28s, T-33s, T-41s and T-38s.

After receiving an honorable discharge from the Air Force in 1964, he began working a 12-8 shift with a firm in Augusta - Babcock & Wilcox. A plant supervisor, Paul H. Dunbar, Jr., recognized Gerald's potential in the business arena and enticed him into a joint venture in running a government surplus business. Gerald eventually became sole owner and is still running the business, which has apparently earned him the reputation of a successful businessman.

Gerald gives our chapter member Bob Rhodes credit for his learning to fly. Bob told him of the purchase availability of a Cessna 170 at Daniel Field. A ride in the aircraft the next day resulted in Gerald's purchase for \$5,130! Forest Boshears gave Gerald lessons for \$5 an hour and 28 cents per gallon for gas (those were the days, huh?). Ballard soloed in 6 ½ hours and attained his instrument rating in 1977.

Gerald was one of the original volunteers for the start-up of the now annual Boshears Airshows. He was selected as the Aviator of the Year in 1997. He also serves as president of the South Carolina Breakfast Club and has held that position for 29 years. He was inducted into the South Carolina Aviation Hall of Fame in 2004 and is a member and supporter of numerous aviation chapters.

Gerald's personal life has had its ups and downs (haven't we all had them?), but has resulted in three wonderful offspring - two daughters, Janet and Becky, and one son, Michael. One of the daughters can actually fly!

We are blessed with Gerald's membership and grateful for all support (particularly financial) he has rendered our club through the years! We've also enjoyed many Christmas dinners in his huge hangar at Twin Lakes, where he also holds the Toys for Tots drive that provides underprivileged children with a little holiday cheer.

Thanks, Gerald, for all you do to make life better for others!