

YK built by flying pioneers

Powered flight dates back to 1920s in NWT

by **Evan Kiyoshi French**
Northern News Services

It's hard to picture Yellowknife without the steady drone of aircraft engines somewhere in the distance. Isolated from overland traffic, the city was built by aviation pioneers who first began flying to the north to carry out mining exploration during the 1920s, according to Mike Vaydik, of the Fox Moth Society – a small group dedicated to preserving the history of aviation in the North.

Vaydik was born and raised in the city, and says he gained an intimate knowledge of local aviators.

"I remember we used to jump on top of a load of lumber and go flying," he said. "On the way back ... we'd stop and go fishing somewhere. So I logged a lot of hours as a kid. You can't be in Yellowknife very long without being aware that (it's) very aviation-centric."

Eighty-five-year-old Yvonne Quick – a former-aviator and organizer of last

weekend's float plane fly-in held at the Wardair Dock – said flying has changed much since she moved to the city.

Quick – who comes from Swift Current, Sask., – was introduced to hangar life by her father, a veteran flier of the First World War.

"He was always dragging me off to the airport to have a look at the airplanes," she said.

Quick said she earned her wings in 1960 then started her own crop-dusting business in Saskatchewan. She said a flurry of airfield fender benders prompted some local aviators to invite her to start a flight training school in the city. She moved to Yellowknife and never looked back, she said.

"The cost at that time for 35 hours of flying and 40 hours of ground school was \$685," she said. "It all costs over \$6,000 now. You could do a commercial (pilots licence) at that time for \$2,800. That was a long time ago."

In here time in the city,

Quick watched the aviation industry grow.

"We were the first Northern community to get 737 service," she said. Airplanes have been in the North for a long time, said Vaydik. In the 1920s Imperial Oil flew Fokker biplanes, after oil was discovered in Norman Wells.

City linked to aviation

"In ... I think it was 1928 that Punch Dickens first flew over the Barren Lands, which opened up the whole country's eyes to the availability of aircraft to help with mining exploration. The mining companies themselves had their own air forces."

The city is inextricably linked with the industry that has supplied it for so many years, said Vaydik.

"If you look at the names of a lot of Yellowknife streets, they're named after aircraft types. And I think the airport is the unsung economic engine of the town," he said, adding

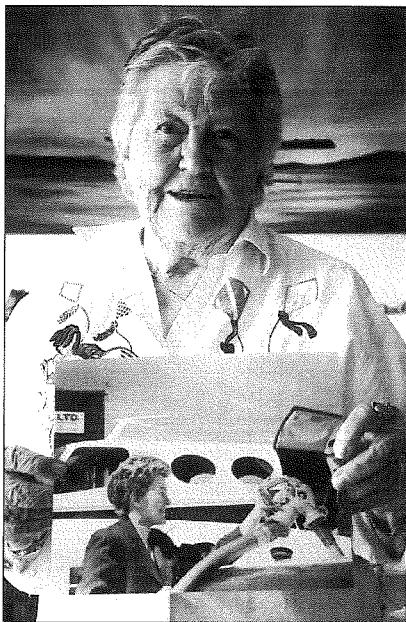
for a city that has so many planes flying in and out every day, it has a good track record for safety. "In the early days it was a bit risky but that risk has been minimized. Equipment is better, navigation aids are better."

Vaydik said the Fox Moth Society is in the process of refreshing the de Havilland Fox Moth Exhibit at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre.

"It's a great display but its been the same for many years," he said. "We're looking at how we can maybe update it a bit, maybe add some features to it."

He said they're also working on finding space to house a Fairchild bushplane, found wrecked near Artillery Lake, where it crashed around 1952.

He said the plane is being restored at the Western Canada Air Museum in Winnipeg, where it will be displayed on loan until the Fox Moth Society can find a place to exhibit it in Yellowknife.



Yvonne Quick, 85, holds a photograph taken in 1967 showing her pouring fuel into the gas tank of an airplane. She was a charter pilot, a flight teacher and crop duster during her flying career.