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JEAN AND JO at Galt Airport's "country control tower" office in Wonder Lake, Illinois.

now paved, and there's a spit and polish about the place visible even from the air.

"There's Jo!" said Jean as we taxied in. Her twin sister lives just beyond Galt's traffic pattern, on Wonder Lake.

One thing that hadn't changed beyond fresh paint was Galt's nostalgic "country control tower" airport office. Now this felt like old times! While Jean and Jo chatted on the ramp-side bench, I ventured inside. There to welcome me were Facebook friends I'd never met in person: pilot Greg Kaiser and his instrument instructor, Mike Nowakowski. Galt's cheerful ground instructor, Ed Brown, piled us into a golf cart to tour the field.

Our first stop was the thriving maintenance shop, where I met Brian Spiro, service coordinator. From there we wandered hangars filled with delectable airplanes: Yak 52TWs of the Aerostars aerobatic team, an imposing de Havilland Beaver on floats, and a pair of gorgeous Stearman biplanes. Our final stop was Galt's nifty rental cabin with fishing pond, from which we could glimpse departing airplanes through the woods.

Treating Galt's fliers like family has really paid off. Aircraft owners are constantly moving in from other airports, and people drive 75 miles from downtown Chicago to train at this booming, privately owned country airstrip.

Jean and Jo intercepted me with sandwiches, and the three of us dined to runway views upstairs in the "control tower." Then Jean and I launched on another 30-minute jaunt, this time to Aurora Municipal Airport west of Chicago for our first formal mission on

FAMILY FLIERS

REVISITING HEARTLAND SKIES

Departing the four lakes of Madison, Wisconsin, Jean and I steered the *Flying Carpet* southeastward toward others embedded in our past: Lakes Koshkonong, Delavan, and Geneva. Beneath our wings flowed a verdant carpet of crops and trees teeming with lakes and rivers. This seemed a watery paradise compared to the stark stone beauty of our adopted Southwest, where the few natural lakes contain only seasonal water and even then might qualify as ponds anywhere else.

Equally refreshing, today's cobalt heartland skies brimmed with music to our aviators' ears. In contrast to largely silent radio frequencies near our remote Northern Arizona home, our headsets crackled with radio chatter from airports around the Midwest.

Jean grew up just across the Illinois line from Lake Geneva, and for years we landed at rural Galt Field (10C) to visit her family. Back then Galt was a narrow, tree-obstructed, rough-around-the-edges strip. But after teetering on the edge of bankruptcy several years ago, the airport turned itself around and blossomed into a thriving aviation community. Seems

like every month Galt boasts a hayride, a barbecue, or a flour-sack bombing contest. I knew of this vitality only through the airport newsletter, having last landed there in 2003. Now I was eager to visit the revitalized airport in person. (See "Flying Carpet: Renaissance Field," November 2013 *Flight Training*.)

Soon Wonder Lake appeared on the horizon, and next to it, Galt Airport. Jean and I recognized the field's location, but not its appearance. The pencil-thin runway we once frequented has long been replaced by a grander one. The hangar that impinged on the west end of the runway is gone; the formerly weedy tiedowns are

this journey—celebrating my mother’s ninetieth birthday.

Although never a particularly enthusiastic aviator, my mother qualified as a private pilot when I was a kid, and co-piloting for a friend, she once placed second in a Ninety-Nines air race. Unfortunately for her, my dad upgraded airplanes shortly after she earned her wings, and the big step from the Cessna 172 to a twin-engine Cessna 310 with auxiliary tanks discouraged her from continuing. She flew extensively with my father, however, to destinations throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Bahamas and Virgin Islands, Cuba, and even Bermuda.

After catching up on family news, I enlightened my mom on general aviation advances in the decades since she last flew light airplanes. My dad once maintained eight four-inch binders of paper instrument charts covering all of North America, the Caribbean, and U.S. military bases. My mom did hours of weekly chart revisions until I was old enough to take over, and earn part of my allowance. She was astonished to see that the entire country’s visual and instrument charts now reside on my diminutive tablet computer. We reminisced about those decades of chart revisions and shared relief at being forever done with them.

There was no GPS when my mom last flew, so I demonstrated modern moving-map navigation. She was also intrigued by our ability to monitor thunderstorms via cockpit datalink weather, compared to the old days when in-flight weather avoidance consisted of flight service radio specialists interpreting sometimes-hours-old, hand-drawn radar summary charts.

While visiting, Jean and I dined with my brother Alan and his fiancée, Chris. Alan earned a pilot certificate while in high school, but between professional obligations and his first wife’s fear of flying, he let those skills lapse. I’m hoping Chris will encourage him to rejoin us in the sky. Next stop, Michigan! 🍷

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