

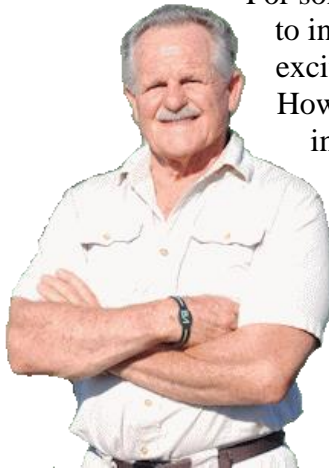
# Arkansas pilot earns rare FAA distinction

By CHRIS HERBOLSHEIMER  
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**S**EARCY, Ark. – For most, aviation represents an efficient form of travel. A way to bypass the pain and suffering that is the family road trip, and nothing more.

For some, aviation is seen as a smart career choice. Commercial pilots travel to interesting places, earn competitive wages, and the job offers more excitement than sitting at a desk.

However, for a very few, the idea of soaring through the sky like a bird inspires passion, becomes a lifelong pursuit.



Ron Menzie, of Searcy, Arkansas, is a man who understands the passion to fly better than most. For more than 50 years, Menzie has been riding among the clouds in his various flying machines. His dedication to aviation, both as a pilot and instructor, has led to him being highly regarded in the aviation community.

Recently, that regard for Menzie was proven when he was given the Federal Aviation Administration Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award. "I've spent the majority of my life saying that accolades mean very little, and it's the pursuit of excellence that matters, but it's hard to say that

about this award," said Menzie. "I am honored to have my name added to a list of pilots I admire so much."

The Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award is the most prestigious award the FAA issues to pilots certified under Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations, part 61. This award is named after Orville and Wilbur Wright, the first U.S. pilots, to recognize those who have exhibited professionalism, skill and aviation expertise for at least 50 years while piloting aircraft as "Master Pilots."

To be eligible for the award, nominees must hold a U.S. Civil Aviation Authority or FAA pilot certificate, have at least 50 years flying experience, and their prior accident/incident histories are examined, and must be deemed not excessive.

From the pool of applicants who meet the qualifications, a select few are chosen to receive the honor each year. In 2020, 571 pilots across the U.S. achieved the Master Pilot distinction; Menzie was one of six Arkansans to do so.

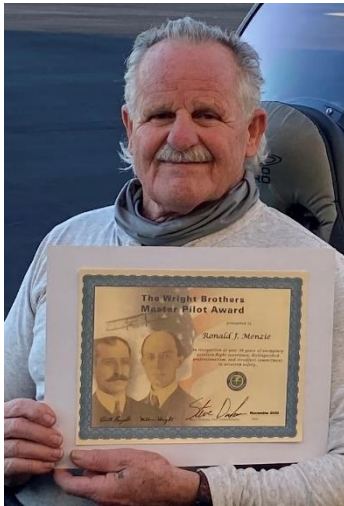
For Menzie, it all began back in the summer of 1967 when he and his wife, Sandra, were out for a Sunday drive in their native Rhode Island. Menzie notice a strange-looking object flying near the Westerly airport. It sort of resembled a helicopter, but looked more it had been built with an erector set and had a lounge chair stuck to it. Menzie had to investigate, and soon found the contraption was a Bensen Gyrocopter. He was hooked, and soon, his very own airframe was being shipped to him. Bensen advertised "Fly out of your own back yard" which Menzie interpreted as being simple. It would be a while before he could afford to buy an engine to power



MENZIE trains to fly his first home-built gyro by spending time in the glider. He spent hours being towed behind the family car up and down the runway by his wife, Sandra.

his gyro into the air, but he eventually installed the Mac Engine and took to the sky. Over the years, there would be faster machines with more bells and whistles, but it was that first flight in the machine built with his own his hands that hooked him for life. "I have certainly had close calls and near misses, but I've been fortunate throughout my career to avoid serious injury," he said. In 1975, the Menzie family relocated to Searcy, Ark. where his obsession with flight only grew. Eventually, he would add fixed wing aircrafts to his list of skills, building his own Burt Rutan designed VariEze, a high-powered, economical machine. Since beginning his flying career, to date, Menzie has logged over 10,000 hours in gyroplanes and 1,500 hours in fixed wing aircraft. From 1977 to 1987, he toured the Midwestern states as an air show performer with the Great American Air Circus, where his piloting skills and bright orange gyrocopter were popular attractions with audiences.

His expertise as an aircraft builder led to the opportunity to construct the tandem gyroplane flown by Ken Brock for the Antarctic Exploration sponsored by National Geographic.



For his contributions to the field of aviation, Menzie was recently awarded the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award by the FAA

"I am cautious. I believe in the checks and rechecks. So many accidents can be traced back to a pilot being in a hurry or taking an unnecessary risk," added Menzie. "I also listen to my instincts. If my gut tells me something isn't right, I listen."

Since becoming a certified flight instructor, Menzie's business, Ron's Gyros, would become a very popular, widely respected, worldwide gyroplane training and licensing facility. Menzie has trained pilots in several states across the U.S. and dozens of countries across the globe.

"It has been my greatest pleasure to meet and fly with some of the most highly experienced aviators from the United States and many other countries around the world. From the novice to the highly experienced, I have learned from each of them," Menzie reflected. "Hopefully, I've made them better pilots and they have made me a better instructor."

Ron's Gyros is still very active with flight instruction and testing for the issuance of pilot certificates. For more information, visit his website – [ronsgyros.com](http://ronsgyros.com)