



September 12, 2021

Mr. Jay McDaniel and the  
SSA Awards Committee

Dear Jay and Members of the Awards Committee:

As the SSA Director for Region 4, I am writing to nominate Mr. Keith Hilton from the Skyline Soaring Club in Front Royal, Virginia for this year's SSA Certificate of Appreciation from Region 4. The reasons for this nomination are his extensive efforts to help Skyline be an excellent and welcoming soaring club.

Keith is originally from Wisconsin and has been with the Air Force for over 41 years. For 24 years he was actually in the Air Force as an enlisted Aircraft Armament Systems Specialist working all over the world on the armament of the current Air Force fighters and bombers. Toward the end of his career, while assigned to the HQ Air Combat Command at Langley, Virginia he was the Chief of Weapons Acquisition Logistics and responsible for developing and overseeing logistics requirements for the latest aircraft weapons and release systems. After his formal retirement in 2004, he continued as a contractor at HQ Air Combat Command where he is responsible for all logistical aspects of the Joint Unmanned Combat Air System aircraft.

He joined Skyline Soaring in June 2012, earned his Private Pilot-Glider rating in 2013, purchased a LS-3 and flies it for the pure joy of soaring. He has been a core member of the club ever since joining, having served on the Club's board for a couple of terms and is currently the Club's secretary. Skyline's president, Stephania Zilora, describes him as an invaluable asset.

Some specific reasons why Keith is an excellent candidate for a SSA Certificate of Appreciation are outlined below.

- Keith is almost always the first member at the field on his duty days and gets everything ready before others arrive. Many members comment that unless one gets to the airport awfully early in the morning, Keith will have the ground vehicles out of the hanger, batteries placed in all the training aircraft, and a preflight check done on every club aircraft.
- Keith has been crucial to keeping Skyline's gliders flying for many years. He takes care of all routine maintenance for the gliders and has created how-to documents so that others have good directions on how to change tires and perform other maintenance items which pilots can perform. He is constantly available by phone for a maintenance consult if he's not at the field. He also spends a lot of time helping the club's AI to keep maintenance costs low.
- Skyline has over 90 members and with a club this large, it is essential to keep everything well organized and have consistent procedures to keep things working correctly and ready for the weekend's operations. He clearly uses his military background to hone the club's procedures. Examples of the kind of things Keith has done include: he has created an organized charging station (carefully labeled) for all the batteries; built up a

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SSA Director, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania, Eastern New York

store of glider parts that need regular replacement (like tires) and manufactured shipping crates to send smaller glider parts (like control surfaces) off for repair.

- As with all clubs, Skyline's operations during the past year have been challenging and the number of operations on the weekend days has decreased. Keith routinely volunteered to increase their operations during the week. Skyline requires a non-flying duty crew for all operations and Keith has been essential for assembling these crews for week days during the pandemic. He volunteers to stay on the ground as duty officer and works hard to talk the rest of the crew (instructors, tow pilots and assistants) to join him in volunteering their time to help the club operate. These operations have helped the club members keep flying and students make progress.
- Finally, Keith is always an ambassador to the public about soaring. When people visit Front Royal, he routinely offers a gliding flight to these visitors - at his own expense ! He also offers free flights to other aviation tenants at the airport. Naturally, these activities really help promote soaring to the public, but perhaps more importantly, they insure the acceptance of Skyline Soaring as an important part of the aviation community in Front Royal.

In summary, Keith uses his aircraft maintenance expertise to help keep everything running, has spent large amounts of his free time to help administer the club as a Board member, has been very important in keeping flight operations running a during the Covid pandemic and is always willing to help introduce new people to soaring. He is the kind of willing and skilled individual that every soaring club needs to have to be successful. For these reasons, I believe that he is an excellent candidate for a SSA Certificate of Appreciation.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

With Best Wishes

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James C. Garrison".

James C. Garrison  
SSA Director,  
Regions 2 & 4