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Hangar, sweet hangar

Neighborhoods with airstrips and room to park the plane are taking off in Central Texas



"Honey, can you park the plane?"

Most people need a garage. But there are few folks who need an airplane hangar.

Luckily for those with a passion for the skies, there are several Central Texas communities that offer the ability to take off at will because the runway is just down the street.

For Dennis Haverlah, a retired LCRA engineer who has owned his first plane, a Beechcraft Bonanza four-seater, for 35 years, it was about being part of a community of people who share the same interests.

"I love flying, and I wanted to be near my plane so I could go whenever I wanted, but we also wanted to be with other flyers," Haverlah says. He has lived in one of Central Texas' first airpark communities, Breakaway in Cedar Park, for 28 years, ever since passionate aviator and Austinite Walter Yates developed it in 1979. "It just seemed like the right thing to do."

For Keith Durio, an avid pilot and longtime custom home builder in Austin, a hangar home was a dream come true. After driving from a Lake Travis home to the plane's hangar at the Georgetown Airport for 20 years, Durio now can walk just a few steps from his front door to his Cessna 310 at the Lakeway Airpark.

"I am just in heaven. Just opening up the hangar door and seeing it in my garage is great," he says, laughing. "Now I can start the plane, go across the street to the runway and take off. It's pretty incredible."

Durio, his wife of 30 years, Sue, and their two daughters, 15 and 17, have flown to the Bahamas and Belize for family vacations, Nevada and Louisiana for weekend getaways, and now to colleges as their oldest decides on a school. She's considering aeronautical engineering as a major and is taking flying lessons, and that's just fine with dad.

"I've been into this since we took a trip in 1985 with a friend and his wife in his plane to the Virgin Islands," he says. "I immediately started taking flying lessons and knew I wanted to be in a community like this someday."

Sam Chapman, a real estate agent in the Lakeway area, says though it's not huge, there is demand for homes in airpark communities.

"It's like waterfront property," he says. "It's a small segment of the market, but once one goes on the market, if it's priced right, it's gone."



Doris Van Trease is married to a retired TWA pilot who keeps two planes at the Spicewood Airport. She's also an agent with Turnquist Partners in Lakeway and says she's getting a lot of requests lately from pilots across the country who want to live in airpark communities here.

One recent sale was a lot that a New Hampshire couple bought so they could build a house and hangar of their own.

"All of the lots in the Lakeway Airpark allow you to have a house and a hangar, and there's only two or three left out of 40," says Trease.

Jeff Passell's fascination with ultralight planes was the reason he and his wife, Tina, purchased 33 acres in Driftwood in 1998, building a 3,100-square-foot house on the side of a hill with a beautiful pool — and a 44-foot-by-44-foot underground hangar in the back of the house. Walk up to the house, or even around back, and you'd never know there's a plane in there.

"I can drive the plane under the house to park it. It's pretty unusual," he says. "The best part is that the temperature is constant year-round. And, though we didn't think of it at the time, it also works well as a storm shelter, and we've used it for that."

Now that their kids are grown, the Passells have decided to downsize, and the Driftwood house is on the market for \$985,000. Polly Sprott of Century 21 Ripley has the listing. But Jeff Passell is already looking for another hangar home, or a home for his ultralight at the airport in New Braunfels or San Marcos. Either way, there will be a spot for his plane.

Many pilots share ownership

Passell's first ultralight was a single-seater Quicksilver MX-2; he sold it to buy a Quicksilver MX Supersport, a two-seater acrobatic plane that could better handle the wind. A few years later, he decided he wanted company.

"I wanted to take passengers, so I got my pilot's license in 1995 and sold the second plane to buy a four-seater Capella experimental," he says. "I moved up in expense a little at a time."

That's the case with many plane owners, but there's a misconception that if you own a plane, your last name must be Trump. While it's true that, as with any big piece of machinery, the bigger you go, the more costly it is to buy and maintain, many who own planes have traveled a long road to get there.

Durio, for example, logged hundreds of valuable flight hours through partnerships — a common route for many owners. The first was a twin-engine plane he bought a share in with three other pilots. They set up a Web site for scheduling, using a calendar sys-

tem so all had equal flying time and shared in annual maintenance costs.

"We each had priority weekends, but there was flexibility if someone wanted to take it," says Durio. "In 18 years, I think there were maybe three scheduling conflicts."

Durio's second plane, another twin-engine, was also a partnership, but it was with just one other person. After several years, it was time for a plane of his own; the house came soon after and was finished this fall.

"For me, half of ownership is just being able to open up the hangar and communicate with other fans," Durio says. "I'm in the hangar, and next thing I know, people come by, we're having a beer and talking about flying. It's a community bound by a common passion."

Feeling more at home around planes

Haverlah says that just about any tool, advice or information he needs is as easy as calling a neighbor. When he decided to build a plane this summer — a two-seater RV-7A experimental plane with a Mazda RX-8 rotary engine — he was able to get the advice of a neighbor who happened to be the technical adviser for the Experimental Aircraft Association. There's also a mechanic in the neighborhood, and someone who specializes in welding aluminum and stainless steel.

"For me, living here is the only way I can afford to fly and stay retired, since I don't have to hangar my planes anywhere," he says. "We also host fly-ins every summer, and the same people have gathered for the last 30 years from all over Central Texas. It's been great."

Even those without pilot credentials are attracted to the lure of a fly-in community.

Haverlah's daughter Sheryl McMillan and her husband, David, purchased two home sites on the runway in the fourth and final section of Breakaway a few years ago — one for themselves and one on which they're building a spec home that should be on the market by December. They say that between the land and the runway, it's a win-win for buyers.

"I don't fly, but I love being out here," says David McMillan. "It's a great area, the sun sets right over the runway, and there's the added bonus of being on the runway if you're a pilot."