



# the ENGINEERS CLUB news

Summer 2004

Dayton, Ohio

Birthplace of Aviation

## Zoe Dell Nutter honored with Deeds-Kettering Award

What an aviation-boosting career club benefactor has had

By Hap Cawood

At the June 2 annual meeting, **Zoe Dell Nutter** was named the recipient of the 2004 Deeds-Kettering Award for outstanding contributions to the Engineers Club of Dayton, another honor in the array of recognitions she has received for her civic leadership and contributions.

To most of the public, she probably is better known as the wife of the late Ervin J. Nutter, an industrialist whose philanthropy is recognized in the name of Wright State University's arena, more commonly referred to as the Nutter Center. She was a full partner with her husband, but she also has been a force in her own right.

Among other things, she has promoted Dayton's aviation heritage with an unrelenting zest and effectiveness. Indeed, she was the first woman president of the National Aviation Hall of Fame in Dayton, and served on its board for a dozen years.

Moreover, she came by her enthusiasm for aviation honestly and her promotional ability naturally. When, as a 4-year-old Oregon girl in 1919, Zoe Dell Landis heard and saw an airplane buzzing over her father's timber mill searching for forest fires, she vowed to fly. When her parents separated, she did washing and cleaning for her dance teacher to pay for dance lessons, her other dream of free movement.

The lessons paid off, literally. During her high school years, Zoe Dell was accomplished

enough to dance in nightclubs on the Pacific coast and help support her mother.

After high school she headed to San Francisco, where she was a high-kicking dancer in the Kit Kat Club chorus line before moving on to the Bal Tabarin club.

From 1937 to 1940, she performed as principal dancer for the San Francisco Ballet. Then her career picked up on her other childhood dream — to move freely in the air.



Zoe Dell Nutter

Her sense of flair and daring converged when her job as the theme girl for the 1939-'40 world's fair in San Francisco — the Golden Gate International Exhibition at Treasure Island — flew her some 100,000 miles to every major state capital and major U.S. city. She landed in news-making style: in a hot-pants-styled pirate costume, delivering invitations to governors and mayors, including New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who insisted that she cover herself with a coat before he would see her. (One headline:

See Zoe Dell Nutter/2

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

#### Page 2

E-mail addresses needed

#### Page 3

- Barn Gang news
- Foundation board news

#### Page 4

Engineers Club wish list

#### Page 5

Frederic L. Rieger,  
1920-2004

#### Page 6

Barn Gang history

#### Page 7

Planned giving

#### Page 8

Tom Crouch returning  
to Dayton

Where  
Professionals  
Connect



**Officers (2004-2005)**

President: Harry Couch  
Vice President: Fred Dudding  
Secretary: Dick Palmer  
Treasurer: Melinda Nutter  
Past President: Hap Cawood

**Board of Governors**

Ed Bentley  
Lawrence Blake  
Ed Frank  
Ben Graham  
JP Nauseef  
Scott Reeve  
Marion Wright

**Fellows**

('87) Dr. Hans von Ohain  
( '88) Ermal C. Frazee  
( '89) Lt. Gen. James Stewart  
( '90) Dr. Fritz Russ  
( '91) William Lockwood, P.E.  
( '92) Hardy Trolander  
( '93) Dr. Ervin J. Nutter  
( '94) Charles Abramovitz  
( '97) Virginia Kettering  
( '98) Harold Shaw  
( '03) John Bosch

**Committee Chairs**

Building & Grounds: Jo Wilson  
Events: Leatha Stewart  
Finance: Fred Dudding  
House: Ed Frank  
Marketing/Communications: Dan Patterson  
Membership: Pam Miller Howard

**Club Staff**

General Manager: Carrie Boiteau  
Secretary: Brenda McQueen  
Executive Chef: Laura Cotton

**Club Foundation**

President: Robert Stone  
Vice President: Rick Novak  
Secretary: Christian Egli  
Treasurer: Patrick Adamson

**Trustees**

Al Leland  
Hardy Trolander  
Dr. Gordon Sargent  
Clifton Williams  
Japnell Braun  
Glenn Sickinger  
Dale Martin  
Chuck Allport  
Leatha Stewart  
John J. Janning  
Larry Jenkins

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*Founded in 1914 to serve the engineering and professional community.*

*The Engineers Club does not assume responsibility for statements and opinions in the articles, papers and discussions appearing herein.*

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**Zoe Dell Nutter/From Page 1**

“LaGuardia Aides Eye Zoe, Scream”) Zoe Dell recounted in a 1995 *Dayton Daily News* feature: “The Women’s Club was taking a dim view that I wore this short skirt. My schedule was booked after that.”

By the time World War II broke out, Zoe Dell was in films, but she quit her contract with Paramount Studios to join the USO and entertain troops in California. The side effects of tumors in her kidney area ended her dancing days. So she began taking flying lessons in the desert of Las Vegas, where her first husband was stationed.

She was not the traditionally inclined military wife, satisfied to play bridge with the ladies on the base. So when she and her husband separated, she found work as a pilot and selling flight courses and airplanes for Piper Aircraft Co. in Monterey, Calif.

That sales job eventually brought her to Dayton in the first of three trips to check out a fold-up, park-in-garage plane. Ervin Nutter’s company, Elano Corporation, which since has been sold to General Electric, built part of this plane. Zoe Dell was never sold on the prototype plane, but she was drawn, through a mutual interest in aviation, to Ervin Nutter, whose first marriage had ended in 1964. They married in December 1965, and she did promotional work for Elano and piloted the company plane.

Ervin Nutter, honored in 1993 as a Fellow of the Engineers Club, passed away in January 2000.

In the early 1990s, Zoe Dell let her commercial pilot’s license expire because her eyesight wasn’t as sharp as it was when she was pausing on the tarmac and anticipating takeoff. But she is still frequently in the air, fulfilling her commitments from one coast to another, directing, promoting, advising and all the while carrying a deep dedication to Dayton’s aviation heritage and the potential it offers to the Miami Valley.

She serves on an assortment of charitable, educational and civic boards and is a director of the San Francisco Aeronautical Society. She



In 1938, United Air Lines featured Zoe Dell in this publicity shot.

is a charter member of The Ninety-Nines, the International Organization of Women Pilots, whose first president was Amelia Earhart.

She has been a benefactor of the Engineers Club, developing the Nutter Cyber Safari Pub and sponsoring club memberships for various college students.

Club co-founders Col. Edward Deeds and Charles Kettering could very well have seen her in photographs, perhaps in a *Life* magazine spread, during her promotional heyday. Clipping services declared her the most-photographed woman in the world in 1939-'40. One can easily guess that Deeds and Kettering would have liked to present the award to her themselves, enjoying the verve of it all.

**Send us your updated e-mail addresses**

We would like to keep all members and their spouses notified of club-related events by sending e-mail messages. You can help ensure that you’ll hear the very latest from us if you send the current e-mail addresses of yourself and your spouse to manager@engineersclub.org.

Rest assured that this e-mail address list is private, and your information will not be shared with anyone else.