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PRESS SUMMARY – Regional Aviation Interest, Background

August, 2002. The Soaring Society of America selects the best soaring pilots from across the nation to represent the United States at international World Soaring Championships. In 2002 three Club Class pilots were selected to participate in the 2nd Club Class Championships in Germany. Original article appeared in the Pacific Northwest Aviation & Business Journal and was written by Di Freeze. She can be reached at DIFREEZE@aol.com

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Two Northwest Sailplane Racing Pilots Selected for U.S. Team to Compete in Germany

**By DI FREEZE
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Each year, soaring pilots from around the nation come together to compete for the title of national champion of their respective classes. Three pilots will represent the U.S. Soaring Team for the 2nd FAI Club Class World Soaring Championships, to be held August 10-24, in Musbach, Germany. Two Northwest pilots have been selected for the team.

"To have two local pilots compete in the World Championships is unprecedented," said Linda Chism, vice chairman of the Seattle Glider Council, an umbrella organization of various clubs in Washington.

Steve Northcraft, the sports class national champion for 2001, has been soaring since soloing a Blanik at age 24. Now 50 and a resident of Renton, Wash., he has approximately 2,000 hours in gliders and over 500 in various powered aircraft. An aeronautical engineer by profession, Northcraft has worked on CONDOR and Predator projects while at the famed Boeing Phantom Works near his home in Seattle.



Steve Northcraft

Northcraft is the current president of the Seattle Glider Council Soaring Foundation and a board member of the Seattle Glider Council. A director of SSA's Region 8 for nine years, Northcraft is a past Boeing Employees Soaring Club director, tow pilot, SSA vice chair and the chair of SSA's technical committee.

He has flown over a dozen nationals, most recently in his LS-8. He holds five Washington state records, including a 78.5 mph 300 km triangle and holds U.S. Diamond #672. He will be flying the Club Class World Championships in Germany with his father as crew.

Mike Newgard, 46, of Maple Valley, Wash., is the current regional champion. Newgard, a manufacturing and test engineer, was introduced to soaring at the age of 7, when his father, Pete Newgard, started taking soaring lessons. He attended his first national contest as crew for his father at Marfa in 1969.

Newgard took lessons in 1974 after high school and soloed a 2-33 at age 18 the same year. His early experience was flying a Cherokee II for a couple of years. Newgard flew in Texas for 15 years, and has assisted Dick Johnson with his sailplane flight tests. He moved to the Seattle area from Texas in 1994, to work for Korry Electronics, a manufacturer of cockpit switches and indicators, displays, control units and panels.



Mike Newgard

Much of the soaring in the Pacific Northwest takes place at the eastern Washington airport of Ephrata, a site operated by the Seattle Glider Council, where the desert-like conditions provide a lot of lift. There are also some operations at Arlington, Wash. Newgard flies his Ventus C with the Seattle Glider Council.

An accomplished sailplane pilot with 3,000 hours in gliders, Newgard has flown in 11 U.S. national contests including five sports class nationals. His wife Becky will accompany him to Germany as his crew.

The non-Pacific Northwest participant will be Henry "Hank" Nixon, who lives in Wayne, N.J., with wife Dianne, a crewmember. Nixon is vice president of engineering for Mahaffy & Harder Engineering, a manufacturer of packaging machinery. Now 52, he was 4 when he saw his first gliders on Harris Hill, N.Y., and decided he was going to be a glider pilot. He started soaring right after his college graduation in 1972. In 1974, he became a CFI; he flew his first contest in 1976, winning his first regional contest a year later.



Henry "Hank" Nixon

An active racing pilot, he has flown approximately 22 nationals in sports, standard, and 15-meter classes and won the U.S. 15-Meter National Championships in 2000.

In 2001, the Nixons flew at the first World Club Class Championships in Gawler Australia, where they finished in seventh place. Dianne also served as team manager at the Club Class Worlds and has been active in fundraising and other support for U.S. competition soaring.

Nixon has about 5,700 hours, with about 4,900 in gliders. The Nixons were part time commercial operators for 17 years and founding members of the Valley Soaring Club in Middletown, N.Y.

Nixon is a member of the SSA Rules Committee and acts as CFI at the club; he has soloed close to 100 teenage glider pilots. In the Nixon stable are several gliders including an ASW-27 and ASW-28, which he races, plus a couple of 1-26s used by club members. The Soaring Society of America chooses United States Soaring Team pilots based on recent performance in national and world-level competition. After each of the U.S. nationals, competitors' scores are compared to the winners' score. Each of the national winners receives a score of 100 with the rest of the field ranked based on how close their score is to the winners. The pilot's current and two previous years' performances are considered when selecting U.S. Soaring Team members with the current year being weighted more heavily. U.S. Soaring Team rankings can be very close with only a fraction of a point separating competitors. When U.S. pilots do well in world-level contests, they earn bonus points that count toward their selection to future U.S. Soaring Teams.

The World Championship contest organizers and the SSA ultimately determine the number of team members who represent the U.S. at world soaring championships. Since 1950, the Soaring Society of America has fielded 127 pilots to 33 world soaring championships. Five U.S. pilots--Paul MacCready, Jr., A.J. Smith, George Moffat and Doug Jacobs--have returned home as world champions.

All world soaring championships are held under the auspices of the Federation Aeronautique International and the International Gliding Committee. Currently, there are eight classes active in competitive soaring: open, 15-meter, standard, 18-meter, club, world, junior and feminine.

For more information, please visit www.ssa.org/UsTeam/usc_club.htm, or the Seattle Glider Council website at www.seattleglidercouncil.org/