



PASS Member Soars at EAA AirVenture!

PASS is looking forward to its participation again this year in the [Experimental Aircraft Association's \(EAA\) AirVenture](#). FAA employees are critical to the success of this event and recently, the union published a profile of one of the critical members of the FAA team that provides support to the largest airshow in the world!

PASS member Lee Leslie knows his way around an airshow. In fact, he is a key member of a specialized team of FAA Technical Operations folks that serves each year at these kind of events. As an FAA employee for over 25 years and a PASS member for nearly as long, Lee has an impressive breadth of technical expertise and experience.

It's this level of experience that first got him selected in supporting Technical Operations at the AirVenture Air Show in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. AirVenture is held every year at the Wittman Regional Airport and adjacent Pioneer Airport. In addition, a temporary tower is set up at the Fond du Lac Airport and a trailer for controllers is set up in the small town of Fisk. With over 500,000 in attendance and over 10,000 aircraft, AirVenture is the largest airshow of its kind. Since 2013, Lee has been a Tech Ops fixture at the event.

"It's the Super Bowl of aviation," he said. "It's the most intense event in air traffic." To successfully pull off such an event each year, the airshow requires specialized equipment and hours of commitment from technicians and controllers. "The intensity is cranked up and it shows how great Tech Ops and Air Traffic can really work together," said Lee. "We are working side by side, counting 100% on each other during that show."

Lee first volunteered and was selected to serve at the event in 2013. That year, he won an award for the Tech Ops Airshow MVP, which was voted on by his Tech Ops peers. "Once you've worked a year at the show, you may be invited back if you performed well," he said, laughing. "They keep inviting me back, so that is a good sign!"

"A team of us redesigned the equipment Air Traffic uses by creating our own 3D printed modules and circuit wiring," he explained. "The equipment used for the air show is very unique and specialized. I love my job and I'm proud to be a part of the team serving at the event."

According to Lee, the airshow is like a concert. FAA employees selected to work the airshow get there early, set things up, test equipment and train other Tech Ops team members on how to use and maintain the equipment. But the airshow is not simply a concert. It's thousands of planes flying and landing during a seven-day period and it's critical that the unique communication systems are working 100% throughout the event.

Over the years, Lee and the team continually adapt the equipment design and functionality to meet the new Air Traffic requirements to better control and monitor aircraft operations. "Improvements are constantly being considered," he said. Lee knows it's all about viewing the big picture and how



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all the parts fit together.

“There is specialized, custom-built equipment just for the show,” he said. This includes a Mobile Operations Communications Workstation (MOOCOW). “It’s essentially a lifted hay wagon on a platform with a custom-made, three position aircraft voice switch for the controllers to handle departures on various runways.” Lee also created training videos to help others learn how to use the different specialized equipment.

Lee admits there is a certain leeway when it comes to doing whatever is needed to make the airshow a success. “We create and adapt the equipment, real-time, to accomplish what Air Traffic needs,” he said.

Lee is certainly someone you want to have on your side—and he has consistently proven that he is a team player. “I guess I’m the kind of guy who doesn’t say no to a challenge. I say yes and then figure out how to get it done.”

This positive attitude over decades with the FAA earned recognition from management and Lee received the Outstanding Technician Award at the NAS First, People Always annual awards ceremony this past September. “I always act as part of a team. It was an honor to receive the award, but there is no I in TEAM, the award in my opinion is for all the Tech Ops folks working behind the scenes out there.”

Since 2013, Lee has only missed one AirVenture when the 2020 event was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. His knowledge and experience are so specific to AirVenture that his presence at the show has become commonplace. While he is modest about his contributions, it is clear that he is an essential element behind the thousands of takeoffs, landings and air traffic operations. “We are focused and intent on doing the work to the best of our ability,” he said, placing the emphasis again on the efforts of the team. “We rarely get time to enjoy the spectacular shows, but I enjoy knowing we did our very best each year to ensure those participating and watching the show are safe.”