

Pilot Profile: Craig Manka

by Russell Knetzger

Meet your new RAMS Club Secretary-Treasurer, **Craig Manka**, 37, family man; organized man. While very new to the club, Craig has been active for 20 years in radio control of electric model vehicles such as cars, trucks and slot cars, even boats. And since 1993, that involvement has been with his father, Rick Manka and not long after, his father-in-law, Ed Kachellek, now both widowers. Each has been to RAMS club meetings with Craig this year.

Craig traces his interest in an organized approach to life from his Cudahy high school days, where in 1988 he graduated with, and within three years married his high school sweetheart, Sheri Kachellek. Sharing Craig's sense of order, they agreed in high school to marry at age 19 on the same day in April on which both her grandparents and her parents had married. Craig took all the rigorous college prep courses such as physics, even the dreaded Calculus, yet squeezed in hands-on mechanical drafting and metal shop. That led him to study civil engineering for a year at UW-Platteville, one of the UW system's main engineering schools.



Facing marriage and the need for steady work, Craig parlayed his high school jobs with Jonesy's auto service, and with Whitlock Auto supply, both in Cudahy, to a job in the parts department of Schlossmann's Honda City in West Allis. Craig has been there ever since – 17 years, and now heads up the parts and service departments. Honda has proven to be a stable, growing brand. From four people in parts in 1991, Craig now oversees 12 with four drivers delivering Honda parts all over SE Wisconsin, because Schlossmann is a regional parts supplier to service stations.

That requires Craig's stewardship over a standing inventory worth \$500,000. Parts and service are all about organization, a skill which Craig enjoys. He has already sorted and organized all past Secretary -Treas. records of the RAMS



Craig Manka with his Hobbico "Nexstar Trainer", OS .46 ABC engine, 69 in. wing span, 722 sq.in. area ,6.5 lbs. and other R/C equipment - car, off-track, and speed boat.

Club, taking office only last month.

The success of Schlossmann's Honda City enabled Craig and Sheri in 1995 to build a home in east Caledonia for themselves and what has evolved to be three daughters, Allison, 11, Ashley 8, and Anna, 6. The home is near Lake Michigan, between Oak Creek, Racine, and Wind Point. Its large basement permitted Craig to install the car racing track that he and his dad and father-in-law could use privately, though now carpeted for family use.

In past years they had raced at Raceways Hobbies near Howell & Rawson Avenues in Oak Creek, until that shop closed. That is where Craig and his crew met George Andritsis, and when George transferred to Cudahy-Greenfield News & Hobby, the Manka-Kachellek guys took their patronage there.

The 2007 switch by Craig to model aircraft has left the two grandfathers a bit perplexed, but they are supporting him, cautiously, by buying their own trainer aircraft. Both grandfathers want to fill the void left by the passing of their wives, Yvette Kachellek only 16 months ago, and Rick Manka's wife seven years ago. If Craig successfully solos this coming season, that may embolden the two dad's to try also.

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