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# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of MATHEW (MAT) J. KANIA

**Modeler, Model kit designer for Megow-Sterling,  
Competitor, Contest Director**



1917 - October 26, 1997      Started modeling in 1927  
AMA #1473

Written & Submitted by MJK (10/1996), *Model Aviation* Staff (01/2008); Transcribed by NR (11/1996); Edited by SS (2002),  
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## Career:

- Employed by Megow Model Corporation as designer and draftsman
- Became Chief Engineer at Megow
- Designed the *Miss Richmond*, second successful flying gas model after Maxwell Basset
- Became chief engineer and production manager for P.D.Q. Products Company
- Instructor of model plane building and flying class, at the Nicetown Boy's Club in Philadelphia
- Originated the Annual Challenge Fun Fly between the Cape Coral R/C Sea Hawks and the Southwest Florida RC Aeromodelers of Fort Myers, Fla.

## Honors:

- 1985: Recipient of the first Cape Coral R/Sea Hawks Man of the Year Award
  - 2007: Model Aviation Hall of Fame inductee
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I, Mathew J. Kania, 128 Southwest 54th Street, Cape Coral, Florida, (79 years of age and still very much alive) started building model planes in early 1927 using balsa wood and Ambroid cement. I entered them in local hobby shops. Later the same year, I designed my flying stick models using rubber bands for power. I also made a lot of gliders, hand-launched, and tow-line.

My first fuselage built-up model with 1/16" square balsa was the Spirit of St. Louis. In 1927, being a young boy, I drew up a plan of what my eyes saw from a 3/4 view picture in the newspaper of the plane with which Lindbergh crossed the ocean. I used balsa and shoebox tissue paper with rubber cement for the adhesive. The model did not fly well, but it pulled well on the porch floor in Philadelphia, Pa. where I lived. The neighbors thought this was great and said I would be another Lindbergh.



I continued building all kinds of rubber band powered models, thereafter. I took my models to school, and the Sisters of the Catholic school I attended thought my models were so great that they had me take the models to hobby and craft shows to Center City Philadelphia.

In 1932, a hobby shop owner asked me to design a baby Rise-off-Ground (R.O.G.) that he kitted and sold to the junior high schools for their hobby classes. The models would have to take off the ground and fly for 30 seconds. For that, they received a grease monkey pin. The shop owner brought me my first Brown Junior Motor #11.

As a member of the Philadelphia Model Plane Association, I built and entered all of my designs in model plane meets, both indoor and outdoor. One of the years, I received my first place trophy for the year. Jesse Beiberman was our club president and a high school teacher. He gave me the incentive to continue in the model airplane field. I feel that I owe him for my success, especially in getting into the gasoline engine era. He had the transportation and took me to all the contests that made my name and models famous.

I could go on and on about the highlights of my life and model planes. I guess one great memory was when I served in the Navy during the World War II. I had my training at Bainbridge, Maryland in early 1944. After a nine-day leave, 800 of us were to leave for the ships to go over seas. The officer in charge told me that I was to stay back and be with the ships company or be with the elite members of the base.



After a time they allowed me to take another leave. This time I came back to the base with my U-Control models, which I flew during chow time. Thousands of (boots) watched and gave me a big hand for my performance. They never saw anything like this in their day. I also flew my models at pre-baseball games. For about three months, I was assigned to the model shop where we built model planes and ships with a lot of detail for recognition training. The next big break came when I received orders to go to the Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland as a one-man draft. In a couple of days, I was assigned to the land plane and seaplane group. My job was being a ground crew plane captain. This is when you are to take care of two or three planes and keep them in flying condition. I enjoyed the job. If we ever needed parts for the planes, I went along with the officer or officers, and they let me fly the planes upstairs. I never mentioned in my story that I am telling, but I did have lessons in flying light planes starting in 1934.

As a ground crew plane captain, one thing I will always remember is when we had the Army/Navy Fighter Conference in 1945. The manufacturers brought in all their latest planes from all over the U.S. to show what they could do.

All of the big brass was there to witness a contest between a new F-8-F and a Jap Zero. The event was to take off with full brakes and full power, climb to 1,000 feet, and fly back about a mile to a designated spot. The two planes took off when they received their signal. The F-8-F took off in 34 feet, climbed straight up to the 1,000-foot altitude and to the designated spot while the Zero was still climbing to the 1,000-foot altitude.

I will never forget how Forrestal (Secretary of Defense) held on to his hat and watched the F-8-F climb. The next day was devoted to the Marines and Coast Guard showing off and flying all different types of craft, which they considered buying for their services. One of the people invited to the Conference was Charles Lindbergh.

I will never forget as long as I live when he, being my idol of aviation, asked to fly my Grumman F-2-G of which I was plane captain and how I spoke to him and checked him out before takeoff. Not too many members of the A.M.A. had such an opportunity as this in their lifetime.

### **Designs by Mat Kania Kitted by Manufacturers**

#### **Designs Kitted by Megow Corporation. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

1934: Helped in the Design & Engineering of the *Flying Quaker*

1938: Designed Class A & B Gas Model Free Flight, *Ranger*

1945: Designed Stardust, National speed record holder while in U.S. Navy

1946: Designed *Flying Circus*, Profile U-control Stunt model 1946 Designed Tyro); Built up U-control Stunt Model

- Designed *Super Quaker*, Class C-Free Flight

1947: Designed Perky, Class A Speed Model

- Designed *Baby Quaker*, Class A Free Flight

#### **Designs Kitted by P.D.Q. Products Co. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

1948: Designed *Super Clown*, Class B U-Control Stunt Model

#### **Designs Kitted by Sterling Models Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

1950: Designed the worlds most populous Profile Control Line Stunt Model (Ringmaster)

1953-1958: Designed *F-51 Mustang*, semi scale profile

- *Yak-9*, semi scale profile
- *Ringmaster Jr.*, Class A-Profile
- *Super Ringmaster*, Built up Fuselage model
- *Baby Ringmaster*, Profile model
- *Space Kaydet*, Fuselage Class A

### **Other Achievements**

Started building models in 1927. Won contests in solid wood scale models outdoor and indoor rubber-powered indoor Microfilm models. Was member of the Philadelphia Model Plane Associates and Philadelphia Gas Model Association.

1939: Employed by Megow Model Corp. as designer and draftsman

- Built Megow *Soaring Eagle* for 1939 New York World's Fair

1946: Became Chief Engineer at Megow

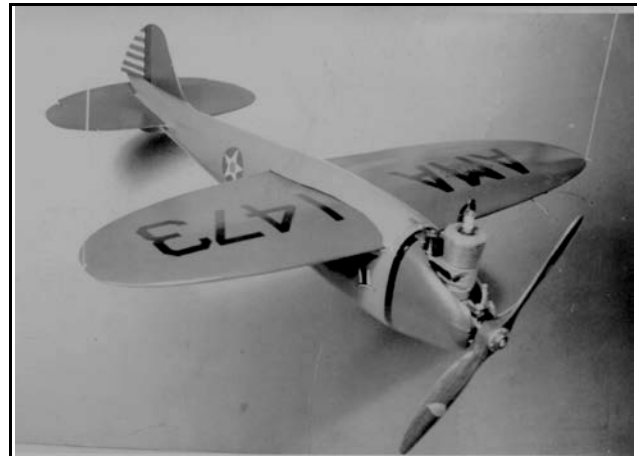
1932-1933: Designed the (Miss Richmond) 2nd successful flying gas model after Maxwell Basset

1948-1949: Became chief engineer and production manager for P.D.Q. Products Co.

- Designed the (Sunday Flyer) Fuselage Midwing Model

1957-1958: Instructor of model plane building and flying class, at the Nicetown Boy's Club in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1941-1958: Entered many contests for Free Flight and U-control in areas of Philadelphia, PA, Reading, PA, Lebanon, PA, Harrisburg, PA, Newark, NJ, New York, NY, and Atlantic City, NJ.



### **Leadership**

Helped establish Patuxent Model Engineers in 1944 with Harold deBolt and Bob Dishong while in the U.S. Navy Club Officer.

1983: Chairman of the scale contest for the S.W. Fort Myers Club

1985: Vice President of Cape Coral R/Sea Hawks Club

1986: President of Cape Coral R/Sea Hawks Club

1985: Recipient of first Cape Coral R/Sea Hawks Man of the Year Award.

- Originated the Annual Challenge Fun Fly between the Cape Coral R/Sea Hawks and the Southwest Florida RC Aeromodelers of Fort Myers

*(signed) Mat Kania 10/96*

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*The following information was published in the January 2008 issue of Model Aviation magazine.*

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### **Mathew J. Kania 1917-1997**

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh made history as the first man to fly nonstop across the Atlantic

Ocean. Lindbergh raised standards in aviation through his accomplishment and inspired children to achieve their own piloting goals.

Mathew J. Kania was a child inspired by Lindbergh. He began building models in early 1927 with construction that was chiefly balsa and Ambroid. He was primarily dedicated to rubber band-powered aircraft, but did make hand-launched and towline gliders.

Mathew's first fuselage built-up model was sketched from a ¾-view image printed in a newspaper: the *Spirit of Saint Louis*. He assembled it from balsa and shoebox tissue paper with rubber cement for adhesive. While the model did not fly well, it drew much attention from his neighbors.

Mathew continued building rubber band-powered models and started bringing them to school. It was here that the sisters of his Catholic school saw his work and believed it was good. They encouraged Mathew to take his models to hobby and craft shows.

When he was 15, a hobby shop owner asked Mathew to design a baby ROG model. The model would have to take off from the ground and fly for 30 seconds. It was Mathew's first commissioned design and it was kitted and sold to junior high schools for hobby classes. This same shop owner also brought Mathew his first Brown Junior engine.

Mathew's baby ROG was the first of many models produced in his career. They were kitted by companies such as the Megow Corporation, P.D.Q. Products, and Sterling Models. He designed models including the *Super Clown*, *Flying Quaker*, *Stardust*, and *Ringmaster*.

The *Ringmaster* is Mathew's most famous and possibly the most frequently produced and built kits of all time. Originally developed in 1950, the *Ringmaster* is still winning contests today.

At the 2006 Nats, five of these models placed within the top 10 in their divisions. The design has also developed into a series of models.

The Megow Corporation employed Mathew in 1939 as a designer and drafter. During that time, he built the Megow *Soaring Eagle* for the 1939 New York World's Fair.

Mathew worked his way through the organization to become Chief Engineer and Production Manager in 1948.

Mathew's career at the Megow Corporation was interrupted by a stint in the US Navy during World War II. He completed training in 1944. While in the service, Mathew brought some of his Control Line models to the base and flew them for others during lunchtime.

He was assigned to the model shop where he built airplanes and ships with great detail for recognition training. Mathew was then given orders to go to the Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland where he was assigned as a ground crew captain.

One of the most exciting moments of Mathew's Navy career was the Army/Navy Fighter Conference in 1945. Manufacturers brought their latest airplanes from around the United States to show what they could do. Several big names in aviation were invited to attend the event.

One attendee – and probably the most important to Mathew – was Charles Lindbergh. Mathew wrote in his AMA History Program autobiography [the name was later changed to AMA History Project], "I will never forget as long as I live when he asked to fly my Grumman *F2G*, of which I was plane captain, and how I spoke to him and checked him out before takeoff."

When Mathew's children, Matthew W. and Constance, learned their father had been inducted into the Hall of Fame, they wrote, "We are so happy to hear that Dad has been inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. This is truly a dream come true for both of us. Thank you."

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**AMA History Project**  
National Model Aviation Museum  
5151 E. Memorial Dr.  
Muncie IN 47302  
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511  
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

