

# Dennis Willows



Dennis mentoring youngest grandson Sam, age 8.

Dennis was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1941. His family lived about 10 miles from the airport, and he started to make regular bike trips to the airport. His lifetime interest in aviation started when a P-51 pilot slid his canopy back and waved a gloved hand at the ten-year-old kid whose face was pushed up against the chain link fence.

After graduation from high school in Winnipeg, Dennis came to the U. S. on a student visa, and went to Yale University majoring in Physics. After graduation, he went on to earn his Ph.D. at the University of Oregon in Eugene, where he pursued research in the neurosciences. One day there a colleague and friend, Ben Walcott,

was flying up to the Friday Harbor Laboratories in his Piper 160, and invited Dennis to come along. It was a low IFR day, and Dennis became acquainted with I Follow Roads IFR. That first flight sealed the deal. Dennis started flying at Friday Harbor, after a first demo ride with Roy Franklin, then lessons with Bob Nichols in the Island Sky Ferries' Cessna 140, and earned his private license in 1969.



Dennis with Glasair Sportsman



With F-18 at Whidbey Naval Air Station on field trip organized by Mari Peterson (third from left).

Active flying has fit into Dennis's work and family life ever since. He joined the faculty at the University of Washington in 1969. While based in Friday Harbor, he was teaching two to three days a week in Seattle. Driving and ferries soon became impossible, so he needed a float plane. A fine Cessna 172 on 2400 floats and a Franklin 220 h.p. engine joined the family as Dennis improvised a way to haul it in and out of the water at the Labs. He flew that airplane for 34 years, then put on larger Bauman amphibious floats for another 7 years until 2012.



Dennis with Cessna 172 on new amphibious floats in Montana

More recently, Dennis and his family together built their own Glasair Sportsman over a 10-day period at the factory in Arlington, WA. Four high school students and their two teachers from Weyauwega, Wisconsin, who had won a national contest in aircraft design, joined the team through sponsorship of the General Aviation Manufacturing Association.

With a total flying time of some 3,500 hours (with three-quarters on floats) over the last 51 years, Dennis still flies actively, including as a member of the San Juan Eagles flying cancer patients to the mainland for radiation and/or chemotherapy treatments. He helped organize a ground school led by



Daughter Grace riveting on Sportsman, with tech oversight reflection

Mari Peterson for students at Friday Harbor High School in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) program.

As Director of the University of Washington's Friday Harbor Laboratories from 1973 to 2005, he has made many contributions to our island and aviation community. Although he is allergic to taking credit for his many contributions, he is well deserving of being honored as the 2019 Featured Pilot in the San Juan Aviation Museum.



With students, teacher and family at Glasair factory, 2016 (left to right, Grace Willows, Dennis Willows, Angus Willows, Derrick Cleaves, Natasha Stemwedel, Logan Feltz, and Austin Krause. Their teacher standing behind is Mike Larsen, and the EAA trainer on the right side of the group is Jerry Graf.)