

# Two men save plane

By **CONNIE JO DISCOE**  
McCook Daily Gazette

Special skills on the ground and in the air — and lots of coincidence, luck and answered prayers — prevented an emergency landing that could have resulted in disaster on a runway at the McCook Regional Airport last Wednesday afternoon.

A couple of Decatur County men played a big part, one driving a “chase” truck on the runway, one in the plane.

Nine times around the airport and nine times down the runway, the red-and-white Cessna Centurion 210 flew with its right landing gear drooping and refusing to lock into place — despite desperate attempts to grab it with a long hook and a firefighter’s pike pole from the back of a racing pickup below.

On the 10th pass, two men crouching in the back of the pickup — driving 90 miles an hour beside the cockpit and under the wing of the plane — snagged the sagging landing gear with the pike pole and yanked it up into place. It locked.

The pilot landed after one more circle over the McCook airport, at 4:36 p.m., and he and his mechanic-passenger stepped out in front of Red Willow Aviation, where their harrowing experience had begun several hours earlier.

“I bet those two felt like astronauts,” said Mick Brosius of North Platte, the owner of the plane, “really, really glad to be on the ground.” He said he wasn’t worried about the condition of the plane; the men were more important.

Mr. Brosius said Mr. Malleck told him it was “the most hair-raising experience” of his life. Malleck said the situation went from bad to worse. “First I had two people in trouble,” he said, “the pilot and mechanic in the plane. Then we added the driver and the two men in the pickup, and I had five people in potential trouble.” Mr. Brosius said he had brought the plane to Red Willow Aviation owner Griff Malleck and his aviation mechanics to repair an oil leak from the flaps and the landing gear.

“Griff said it was lucky I brought it (the plane) to him with a full tank of fuel,” he said, “because that gave them the time to keep trying.”

The special skills of one of Mr. Malleck’s employees helped the rescue effort — Jeff Williams of Oberlin, one of Malleck’s mechanics, is a race car driver. He drove the pickup, as Jeff Polly, an owner of K&J Tire, and Toby Cox, a spray pilot, knelt in the back of the pickup with a long hook shaped like a shepherd’s crook, and when that failed, a fiberglass pike pole taken from a McCook fire truck.

On the second pass down the runway, the men grabbed the left landing gear and it locked into place. Malleck said this morning they thought both would come down then, but the right one didn’t.

Seven or eight more trips around the north end of the airport and that many more trips down the runway, the pilot flew, the pickup raced, the men in the pickup bed reached and grabbed, and everyone prayed.

On board with Hagert was mechanic Krent Townsend of Danbury. Obviously delighted to be on the ground and “high-fiving” and hugging well-wishers waiting at Red Willow Aviation, Mr. Hagert declined to comment on the experience.

Mr. Brosius said he has owned the plane, built in 1963, for eight to 10 years.

“It’s had good care,” he said. “It’s a fairly fast plane — probably 200 mph. It probably has to slow to 90 to land.”

Mr. Malleck said many things went right Wednesday afternoon — the wind was just right down the runway and he had experienced crews in the plane and on the ground. Having the plane full of fuel gave Mr. Malleck and his crew about two hours to figure out what to do before attempting the race-and-grab efforts on the runway.

The fixed-base operator said he had seen an effort like this on television, and decided to try it as a last option.

Getting one landing gear down and not the other actually made the situation worse, he said.

“Landing that way would have definitely gotten someone hurt,” he said. “It was like changing chairs on the Titanic.”

But, while some things went wrong, more went right. The wind, the fuel, lots of experience and lots of patience.

“Everyone kept their cool, everyone worked well together,” Malleck said. “... all’s well that ends well.”

He chuckled, “The most exciting thing we’ll do today is rotate the tires on the pickup.”



**SAPPA VALLEY CONSTRUCTION** owners, Kevin and Jackie Brown, received a merit award from the Kansas Department of Commerce in the manufacturing category recently.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

## Business receives state award

The Kansas Department of Commerce awarded Sappa Valley Construction a merit award in manufacturing recently.

Although owners Kevin and Jackie Brown were unable to make it to the luncheon in Colby last month, the glass award sits on his desk at the highway business.

Mr. Brown said they got a call from Connie Grafel, economic development marketing director, saying that she was going to nominate the construction business. She asked Mr. Brown to fill out the application with background information about the business. Later the couple received the call from Ms. Grafel saying that they received the award.

It is nice for an existing business to be recognized, said Mrs. Brown. It seems like new businesses get the recognition so many times, said Mr. Brown, but once they are plugged in and part of the community it seems that business is lost.

Small rural business is the backbone of America, he said. Those are guys who are employing two to 10 workers. Very few large businesses exist.

The Browns started the business in 1984 out of their home on N. Cass Avenue. That seems like a long time ago, said Mrs. Brown.

The business then moved to another building in town and last year they moved to U.S. 83. When the business first started, they said, they did general construction and remodeling. Now the main focus is just on Wick buildings.

Sappa Valley Construction employs three other full-time people, other than the owners. Mrs. Brown said she can see the business expanding a little more. Mr. Brown said he does have some ideas.

The couple has two children, Natalie, who is attending Kansas State University and Chris, who is attending the University of Kansas.

Mr. Brown is an Oberlin Native and Mrs. Brown has lived here since

the early 80s.

Other awards the business has received include:

- an award of excellence from the Kansas Preservation Alliance Inc. in 1996 for the LandMark Inn at the Historic Bank of Oberlin.
- community investment award from the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp.

Mr. Brown served as a past member on the advisory council for Wick Buildings. He also served on the Oberlin Country Club board of directors for three years, on the Oberlin Gun Club board for eight years and on the Oberlin Jaycees board for six years.

## Register of deeds gets permission to sell old camera

The register of deeds’ office will be advertising its big microfilm camera online to sell for the next 40 days as the county switches to a computer-based service for recording documents.

Register Judy Gaumer told Decatur County commissioners Tuesday that the camera hasn’t quit completely but needs new parts which will cost around \$500.

She said she can have the documents put on microfiche film and a computer CD by sending them to Norton Correctional Facility for \$161, that is, for 1,000 pages of recorded documents. It takes about six months to get 1,000 pages of documents. That will be cheaper than fixing the camera, she said.

Mrs. Gaumer said no one uses that type of camera anymore. It was purchased in November 1990 for \$20,843.

She asked, if she found someone who used that kind of camera, if she could give away the parts, or if she should try to sell it.

Commissioner Ralph Unger suggested trying to sell it on the purple auction online. It is at purplewave.com and it’s an auction site that is run out of Manhattan although it doesn’t have anything to do with Kansas State University. He suggested trying it for 40 days.

There is \$8,944 in the register of deeds technology fund, Mrs. Gaumer said. She said she is looking at getting a new copier. The one

## County Countdown

ATI Decatur County commissioners:

- Talked with the register of deeds about advertising the big microfilm camera on line for 40 days and getting the documents copied to microfiche at the Norton Correctional Facility. Story at left.
- Heard the county valuation may stay the same, although real estate and oil valuations shifted; the total depends on the state-assessed utilities. Story on Page 1A.
- Ratified three purchases of over \$500 for the road and bridge department for vehicle repairs. Story to come.
- Discussed that low-to-moderate income surveys have been mailed out in an attempt to get grant money for a new ambulance. Story to come.

in the office was purchased by Pat Whetzel when she was in office in 2000.

A new one would be around \$5,000 with a \$2,000 trade-in, she said. Ambulance Director Patrick Pomeroy is interested in purchasing the old copier and is looking at his budget.

She said she is getting bids for a new one and will bring them to the commissioners.

## Annual garage sales set for weekend

The Chamber of Commerce’s annual citywide garage sale will begin after 3 p.m. on Friday and again at 8 a.m. Saturday.

For a map of the sales, stop by the Chamber office on Main Street after 3 p.m. on Thursday.

There are at least 30 sales planned for the weekend, including one by the Decatur County Ministerial Association at Centennial Park.

The ministerial association rummage sale will be held from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday. There will also be an antique dresser sold by silent auction.

Money raised by the association helps pay for community projects like baccalaureate, Bibles for the youth ranch, community prayer services and future highway signs welcoming people to Decatur County.

The food stand opens at 10 a.m.

on Saturday and will include barbecued burgers, hot dogs and polish sausages. There will also be tea or lemonade, chips, pie or cookies. Proceeds from the food stand will go to the Decatur County Food Pantry.

Several businesses have donated time and items to the association to help make its events happen including The Gateway, Culligan Water, The Bank and Raye’s Grocery.

Anyone wanting to volunteer for the rummage sale or barbecue should call Shari at 475-2280 or 475-2418.

On Saturday, there will also be a downtown sales extravaganza from 8 a.m. to noon. There will be vendors, entertainment and food for sale.

Anyone who is interested in selling their wares can set up a table for the morning at no cost.

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