

# Board of Directors:

## Rick Peavley

BY JOSEPH E. (JEB) BURNSIDE

**R**ick Peavley's prowess for being able to "think-on-the-go" in the U.S. Navy laid the groundwork for his success today as president of Vero Beach Avionics and as a member of the AEA board of directors, serving in his second term.

### *How did you get into the avionics business?*

Through the military. When I got my invitation to go play in Vietnam back in 1969, I decided to enlist in the U.S. Navy instead and went into naval aviation. I was a ground and in-flight maintenance technician on the Lockheed P-3 Orion for about nine years, based in Hawaii and Maine.

There was quite a bit of avionics aboard, as you can imagine. My job was to keep it going in-flight to complete the mission and, once we landed, get the airplane ready for its next flight. So, if something failed in-flight, I pulled it out of the rack and worked on it. Of course, the equipment we had back then wasn't modular, so we would actually try repairing it, down to the component level, in flight. We weren't always able to fix it while airborne, but sometimes we could keep it going long enough to complete the mission.

### *What did all that teach you?*

It gave me good, hands-on, think-on-the-go training. You're by yourself — granted, there are other people around, doing their jobs, but you're the guy they're looking at to fix the problem. I was 19 when I started.

### *What came next?*

After nine years in the Navy, I got out and ended up in the Panama Canal Zone. I was born in the Republic of Panama; my parents had returned and were working there. So I went back to Panama and got a job working on electronics aboard ships going through the Canal. We would either work on them while the ships were at anchor waiting to go through, or ride them while they went through the Canal. I worked on communications, navigation, radar, gyros — you name it. If it had a wire on it, they'd have us try to fix it. That lasted three years, to 1981.

Then, I went to Seattle, where I had family, and had another job lined up working on maritime electronics. But they wanted to station me in Cold Bay, Alaska, something I wasn't too enthused about. So, I went to an aviation job fair and got hired as a technician by Air Logistics, the helicopter operator out of New Iberia, Louisiana. I moved to Louisiana and started there in December 1981. I started as a bench technician and worked my way up to senior technician. I did the bench work, plus on-aircraft work and field work.

The company was expanding its operations to Alaska and needed an avionics shop up there, so I opened up their first avionics shop in the state, in Anchorage. After a couple of years, I transferred to their organization in Cairo, Egypt. I went back to Louisiana for a couple of years, then back to Egypt for a couple of more years.

By then, it was 1993, and I was tired of going overseas, so I took a job with Crescent Airways, a helicopter operator based in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. They were doing oil industry support in the Gulf of Mexico, government contracts, fire fighting, that sort of thing. They were a small organization but a big



*Rick Peavley, president of Vero Beach Avionics, participates in an AEA board of directors meeting at AEA international headquarters in Lee's Summit, Mo.*

player in the helicopter industry and had operations all over.

By 1995, though, they were going into bankruptcy after being acquired. So I got a job with Sun Aviation in Vero Beach, Florida, headquarters for Piper Aircraft. They were a warranty service center for Piper and we did a lot of aftermarket work, too, both for the factory and their distributors. They had just bought that avionics department, so I pretty much had to build it. I was with them until 2004, when I got talked into opening my own business.

#### ***Who's responsible for that sleight of hand?***

A lot of people over the years asked me why I was working for someone and not for myself. So, finally, I just bit the bullet and went out on my own. The management at Sun Aviation always treated me well, so I had no bad feelings toward them. It was purely a personal decision to try it on my own and, hopefully, make more money.

Sun Aviation is still in business and my company, Vero Beach Avionics, is located on the same field.

#### ***Tell us about Vero Beach Avionics.***

We're a Part 145 repair station, mainly doing avionics, although we are now expanding and taking on aircraft maintenance at the same

time. Presently, we're only about five people strong, but we've got a really good client base. We do a lot of work for Piper and their distributors.

Over the years at Sun, and now at my own company, I've built up a strong relationship with the Piper community. For example, I'm a technical advisor to the Malibu/Mirage Owners and Pilots Association. Our main focus is aircraft modifications: We've done several complete panel upgrades on a number of aircraft. Probably the more interesting stuff is configuring aircraft for the new glass panels — not only making them work right, but look right. We don't believe in the "cookie-cutter" approach when it comes to modifications because every single one of them is different. So there's a challenge with every job we do.

#### ***Do you work closely with the Piper factory?***

Piper actually has their own engineering department, which is pretty independent. Piper is known for building a complete airplane and a great product. They do a good job, although we do an awful lot of aftermarket modifications. We like to go that one additional step,

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and add options or capabilities a customer might want but the factory doesn't offer.

We've also installed a lot of camera and audio-visual equipment. We did a few airplanes for a flight school, installing tail-mounted and cabin-mounted video cameras, both of them running at the same time on a split screen and recording to a memory card. After the flight, the operator can pull the memory card and play back the flight on a computer.

### ***How did you get involved with the AEA?***

Air Logistics was an AEA member, so I followed the association quite a bit, beginning in 1981. Once I began working as an avionics manager, I always made sure the company I worked for was an AEA member because of the benefits offered. The training, the industry involvement and advocacy with the federal government and manufacturers...I just felt it all was very important to have someone on my side.

This industry is highly technical and always evolving. Yet, the federal government hasn't always stayed up-to-date with us. So, we have to deal with new technology and old rules. I really felt having someone like the AEA was an asset and I wanted to be a part of it.

A few years back when the AEA was expanding its committees, I was asked if I wanted to be on one. I applied and was accepted to serve on the association's government and industry affairs committee. That's what I was interested in because I like to know what the federal government is doing — in advance — because we do our best to follow the rules. My name is on — I don't know — hundreds of airplanes, and I don't need lawsuits or families being mad at me. So, we're very proud of the work we do, and we continuously monitor the FAA, its rules and its policies so we know what we're doing is right. By serving on the government and industry affairs committee, I hoped I might have some input into what the feds were doing. Of course, the AEA does comment quite often on proposed rules and I wanted to be a part of that.

### ***What led you to transition from committee work to the AEA board of directors?***

I'm a true believer in the AEA's mandate being "take care of the small shop." Of course, being a small shop and being active at the committee level, and attending both regional and national meetings, I felt the association needed more small-shop representation on its board. So, I ran for election to the board.

I'm in my second term as a director, and we're limited to three terms. I'll run for re-election, but as long as I'm involved with this industry, I'll be involved with the AEA. I like to know what's going on and the only way I can really know that is to stay involved.

It's great having the manufacturer backing that we do, but it's equally important to get back to the roots of the small shops, take care of them and make sure they're doing things right, too. I'd like to get more involvement from small shops, but I've never figured out how to do that. I know what it's like to run a small shop — you get really busy

and it's hard to justify giving your time away to do AEA-related things — but it's well worth it.

### ***Is lack of time the primary reason small shops don't participate enough in the AEA to reap all the benefits?***

I think that's what it is. We have a quite a few small shops in the membership and I know quite a few small-shop owners. But I don't get the feeling they're participating enough to get all the benefits they can out of the organization.

For example, when I visit with smaller AEA members, I'll bring up a recent communication the association sent out on government and industry affairs issue. Although they've received it and filed it, they haven't really read it or understood its implications. They are not spending the time required to stay on top of things. As an association, we need to find a way to make sure all of our members understand what is happening with federal policy.

### ***Is it restricted only to the smaller shops?***

I think it is, because the larger shops seem to have more interaction with the FAA, so they know more. The FAA proposals for safety management systems and proposed TSA requirements are really important things because this is how I make my living. But I'm always talking with people who have no clue about these issues and what it could cost if there's a violation. If I have a federal agency interfering with my ability to make a living, I need to know about it. The general awareness of things like this among the membership as a whole, and smaller shops especially, isn't as great as it should be.

### ***Clearly, the smaller shops have fewer resources to use in monitoring these developments than larger ones.***

#### ***How can the AEA bridge that divide?***

I've been trying to figure that out for the four years I've been on the board. When I first ran for the board of directors, I sent an e-mail to all members, asking them to contact me directly with any ideas for things the AEA could do for them. I don't recall any member actually doing so. I certainly hope they contact the association directly with any questions.

It would be great for us to go out and wander the U.S., visiting these shops and explaining these issues to them. But, for one, all the board members have jobs or work for ourselves, so that's not going to happen. Two, a lot of these people are busy trying to make a living, too. They don't have time to sit down to talk about these things. That's why I really feel the regional and national meetings are extremely important — especially the national meeting — because there's so much information put out and there are so many of our peers one can talk to. It's not a competitive atmosphere at the national meeting, so you can discuss things.

### ***What would you say to an AEA member who came to you saying they were considering dropping their membership because they weren't getting the bang for the buck they expected?***

First thing I'd ask is what they're doing. How are they not getting bang for the buck? What are they trying to do that they're not getting



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**RICK PEAVLEY**

the bang for the buck? And then I would try to explain what is really available to them as an AEA member. I don’t find the membership dues are exorbitant for what is available.

I would turn around the question and ask, “What are you not doing?” You have to be active, to at least go on the association’s website ([www.aea.net](http://www.aea.net)) and see what’s available. Membership in the AEA is like a door through which one has to walk to see what’s available. Once you walk through the door, there are a whole bunch of other doors in there and they’re all available to you. You have to open them and use them, including the AEA staff, which does wonderful work.

I really wish more of our members would spend a bit more time becoming involved with the association and utilizing the services the AEA has. I think it would be time well spent and, maybe, they’d be interested in becoming more involved with the committees and the board of directors. I’d really like to see more small shops stepping into the fray. If you sit in the background and complain without trying to change it, you get exactly what you deserve.

#### ***What should the AEA be doing differently?***

Two things. First, better advocacy with the avionics manufacturers. They often make it difficult to do business, and I’d like to go to them and say, “Folks, you’re hurting the people who got you where you are.”

With all the new glass panels and glass cockpits being installed, especially in new aircraft, the avionics manufacturers are allowing the airframe manufacturer to control access to manuals and software. This restricts what the repair shop can do — we can’t get the information we need unless we’re an airframe manufacturer’s representative. I understand it, because the avionics manufacturers enter into these kinds of agreements with the airframe manufacturers in order to sell the equipment. But we’re the ones out here in the field fixing it and we need more access to the right information.

The other thing is a way to reduce the federal regulatory burden. The AEA Government Affairs Committee has spent many hours discussing this topic and working toward simplification of oversight by the FAA to ensure its policies are as minimally invasive as possible. With the FAA’s proposed rewrite for Part 145 repair stations on the horizon, our committee will have its hands full once the FAA releases that NPRM.

#### ***What’s the next big thing for the avionics industry?***

The ADS-B mandate. It’s difficult to look too far ahead in avionics these days because all the manufacturers are coming out, full blast, with new things. It makes it hard for avionics shops to add to new airplanes. Granted, the legacy fleet is ripe for the picking and we’ve got excellent products to put in.

Of course, the economy isn’t helping anything. If the economy ever turns, your average AEA shop should be healthy, with all the technology we’ve got available to install.

#### ***What about for the association?***

At the moment, controlling the federal mandate and helping our members understand and be able to comply without going bankrupt or out of business. If we don’t follow the mandates, something’s going to go wrong. So, we’ve got to keep all of our shops on track. They’ve got to follow the rules, whether we like them or not. We’ve got to work with the government to make sure the rules are reasonable. The rules have to actually be necessary. Rules for rules’ sake is busywork.

I’d like for the U.S. government to stop doing whatever the European Aviation Safety Agency does and remember we were the birthplace of aviation and we’ve got a few good ideas, too.

#### ***What about you, personally? Any hobbies? What do you do when you’re not growing your business?***

In the past, I used to play a little golf. Since I’ve opened up Vero Beach Avionics, there’s not much time. I’m divorced, with three grown boys. My middle son, an Army ranger, and his wife have brought a granddaughter and grandson into my life, and that’s kind of neat. I’m not sure I ever really expected that. When it comes to any life outside the office, I’m really pretty boring.

My life lately is pretty much focused on the business. Last year, we expanded into a much larger facility and we’re trying to fill it up. I work a lot; my business partner and I are trying to cut back to six-day weeks. I know that’s not typical of the industry, but we’re lucky at the moment to have so much business. □