

Jan. 13, 2021 - La Belle, FL - And the Shortcakes Restaurant

First, a word or two about the year that has just past. While my flying during 2020 had been greatly curtailed, cut in half almost, in truth this turn of events was not entirely Covid 19 related. In a "normal" year I would have entered in excess of 100 hours into my logbook. I barely hit 60 hours in 2020. While many of the airport restaurants that I would usually visit were shut down for part of the year, most reopened for limited business during June. However we saw the handwriting on the wall early on and rather than deal with the hassles of local ordinances, business imposed rules and limited access to much of life's pleasures, Miriam and I decided to take our newly purchased Sprinter motor-home and "get on the road" for much of the year. We made a total of 4 road trips, ranging from a late November two week, 2,000 mile sprint into Tennessee and Georgia to see Christmas Lights Displays to a summertime ten week, 6,000 mile journey to the far West to enjoy the sights and experiences of the Dakotas, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico, with many additional stops in states along the way. In total we were gone for a total of four months and put almost 15,000 miles on the RV.

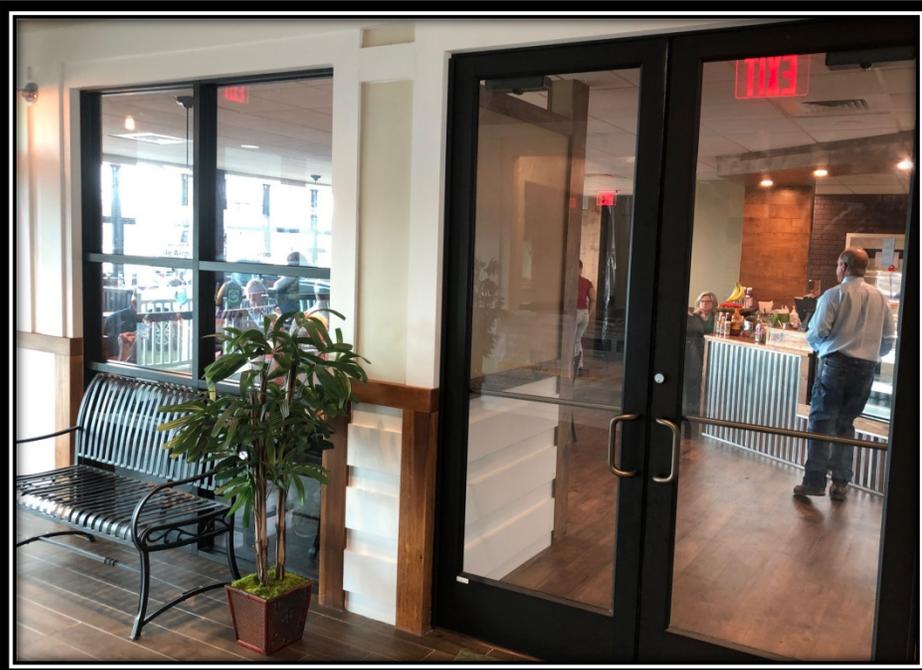
By the time that we returned home, just before Christmas, so that we could spend the holidays up at the Hilton Head condo, I had run out of calendar currency with regard to my legality to fly, which requires a biennial flight review conducted by a certified flight instructor. This is something that is FAA mandated every two years and I use a longtime flight instructor friend for this whenever he travels to Florida, from his New Jersey home, in order to visit his daughter and her family. However he elected to skip this year due to the virus. This meant that I now

needed to find a local flight examiner to perform the required hour long ground school and the one hour of actual flying, in order to complete this review and get back my currency.

Finding one was the easy part, but successfully coordinating our schedules meant that I was not allowed to fly, by myself, until this past weekend. Now that the paperwork has been completed I am finally legally back "in the air" and decided to take a short 45 minute flight (each way) to an airport that I had not visited for almost 2 years... La Belle Municipal. Those past trips were to partake of Mexican cuisine at the small family owned restaurant located directly across the street from the air-field. However I had just heard that the brand new terminal building, that had begun construction during my last visit, was now completed and it featured an on-site restaurant, **Shortcakes** which had breakfast, lunch and dinner menu items. It should be worth the visit.

It was not the best of flying days, with a thin overcast of cumulus clouds which foretold of a frontal passage later in the day. However a climb through the many holes in the clouds put me "on top" at 2,500 feet and the visibility above was excellent. I traveled along the eastern side of Lake Okeechobee and once I rounded its southern boundary it was a due west heading onto La Belle airport, some 45 miles distant. The winds were light and the air was smooth.





Upon landing I found an open parking spot right next to the new FBO complex and its restaurant, which still had that "new building smell" I found out that the owner of **Shortcakes** was an Ashleigh Short, for which the restaurant was aptly named. It was a nice size, able to sit about 50 people I would guess. The following day there was to be a "fly in" by the Old Farts of Florida Flying Club, (**OFF**) of which I am a member. But during these events there are usually at least 50 airplanes vying for both air and ground space and it would be an absolute zoo. So I elected to arrive 24 hours early and I was glad that I did as the place was entirely full when I arrived

at 11:30 AM. The restaurant had been in operation for less than a month and I was glad to see so many people there as it bodes well for its future success. After a short wait I was seated at a small booth and I ordered a bowl of their special chili and a coke. However, the treat of the day was to be a dish of their Strawberry **Shortcake**, for which the restaurant was already famous. Both the entree and my desert were delicious and it's nice to know that I now have another airport with its own dedicated on site restaurant, which I can visit.

However, in all candor, this will probably be my final year of flying. It has gotten to be just too expensive to maintain as a hobby. My hangar rent is now up to \$6,000 a year and insurance premiums are better than half of that. Add in the 500 gals of fuel that I burn in the plane each year, at an average of \$4 per gallon, and you have another \$2,000. I have been spending over \$2,500 a year for aircraft maintenance and the meals associated with all those flights has to be at least a \$1,500. Throw in \$1,000 for my fuel to drive to the airport along with other miscellaneous incidentals and you have \$16K or so expended each year in order for me to enjoy time with my head "in the clouds". Add to that the fact that as one ages their cognitive ability and reaction time begins to suffer, thus making flying a more chancy proposition. So, I have come to the realization that it is probably getting to be about time for me to "come in, out of the clouds". I will miss it!