

Paton Field Centennial Moment—May

The Van Deveres (1936-1966)

The Van Devere brothers—Rudy and Ray—were central figures in area aviation and in many ways dominated early Kent State aviation.

Rudy A. Van Devere



Van Devere Family
Collection

The brothers hailed from Mishawaka, Indiana. Rudy managed an aviation business in South Bend, Indiana, and served as a 2nd Lt. in the Indiana Air National Guard. He arrived in Akron in 1936, taking over the operation of Akron Municipal Airport and forming Akron Airways, Inc. Akron Airways expanded by leasing Mid-City Airport in Darrowville in 1939.

In 1940, Rudy purchased Stow Field and its big house, largely for his family and to shelter his personal plane. He sold the airfield to Kent State in 1942, but retained the parcel with buildings. In 1945 he negotiated with the university for exclusive commercial operating rights in exchange for maintaining the airfield. He proceeded to build a cement block hangar in 1945 and the iconic Quonset-style hangar in 1946.

In 1939, Akron Airways became the sole contractor providing flight training for students in the Civil Pilot Training Program (CPTP) at both Kent State and the University of Akron. Rudy used both Akron and Mid-City Airports for the training, but not the Kent State Airport due to its poor condition. When the U.S. entered World War II and many small airports were shuttered, the Kent State Airport was spared, possibly because of Van Devere's influence.

Rudy's dominance in area aviation ended after the war. The slowing of airplane sales led him to redirect his efforts to automobiles. He became a dealer for Packard in 1947, then Dodge-Plymouth, followed by Oldsmobile. In 1953, he dissolved Akron Airways and sold his hangar parcel to Kent State.

Ray C. Van Devere



Van Devere Family
Collection

Ray, also an experienced pilot, joined his brother in Akron in 1938. During the CPTP era, he was Akron Airways' manager at Mid-City Airport. In 1949, Rudy sold his operation at Kent State Airport to Ray. Now called Repair and Sales Depot, it continued as the university's contractor for flight training. However, Ray's high flight fees drove many students to take instruction with the KSU Flying Club and at Mid-City.

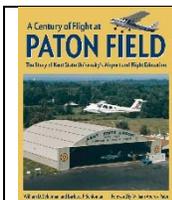
In 1953, when Rudy sold the hangar parcel to the university. Ray and his Repair and Sales Depot became a tenant, but remained as contractor with control of airport operations. The university's lack of access to buildings on the property that it now owned caused serious and ongoing friction with Ray. His request for a rent reduction in 1955 initiated a ten-year review of the airport's role. Andrew Paton, director of aviation technology, advocated change, leading President White to create an Airport Special Committee in 1963. Regrettably, Paton's untimely death occurred before the committee's final

recommendations were approved by the Board of Trustees in 1964. These called for university control of both flight instruction and airport operations, airport improvements, and the naming of the airfield for Paton.

In the summer of 1966, Van Devere's tenure ended with Ray liquidating his business and becoming a university employee. The KSU flight program officially began with the start of fall quarter on September 28, 1966. Instructor Dick Schwabe took the first students airborne on that day.

DID YOU KNOW?

The airport's published elevation changed over time due to alterations in airport boundaries and the length and number of runways. It was 1,150 feet through the 1950s, lowered to 1,120 feet in the 1960s, and raised to 1,129 feet in the 1980s following airport improvements. Today it is at 1,134 feet.



Excerpted from *A Century of Flight at Paton Field: The Story of Kent State University's Airport and Flight Education* by William D. Schloman and Barbara F. Schloman. (Kent State University Press, 2019). Used by permission. Available at the Kent State University Airport, from the [Kent State University Press](https://www.kent.edu/press/), and wherever books are sold.