



VILLAGER BACKSTORY

You may know Dick Stoebel from the pickleball court or the dance floor, but what you may not know is that he helped test and develop the engine that would be used for the Boeing 747 commercial airplane.



Rachel Stuart | Daily Sun

Age: 76
Village: Pennecamp
Spouse: Brenda
Family: A son, daughter and six grandchildren
Moved Here In: 2010
Moved Here From: Manchester, Connecticut
Favorite Villages Activities: pickleball, dancing, swimming and tinkering with model airplanes and antique hot rod cars



Kristen Fiore

THE VILLAGES DAILY SUN

Do you know someone with an interesting backstory to tell? Email kristen.fiore@thevillagesmedia.com, or call 352-753-1119, ext. 5270

When Dick Stoebel was a kid growing up in Clinton, Massachusetts, he was riding his bike down a country road when a plane flew over him. "I looked up and I couldn't keep my eyes off it," said Stoebel, of the Village of Pennecamp. This resulted in Stoebel tumbling off his bike, but he also tumbled into a career at Pratt & Whitney, where he would help build the engine that would be used for the Boeing 747 commercial airplane. Stoebel started out at Pratt & Whitney as a mechanic in the experimental assembly department and then went to Northrop Institute of Technology to become an engineer. He also took flying lessons to obtain a private pilot's license, and between graduating and going back to Pratt Whitney, he worked at a small airport, where a Piper J-3 Cub was for sale.

"I ended up buying the airplane for \$950 and flew it away," Stoebel said. But the Cub needed to be rebuilt, so Stoebel took it apart and fixed it up. The first time taking it out on the runway, he found himself wondering, "Did I get everything right?" Up in the air, the airplane suddenly started vibrating. "So I landed and it turned out the rebuilt wooden propeller was starting to delaminate," Stoebel said. "That could've been catastrophic, but I changed it out, took it back up and never looked back." Later in life, Stoebel was flying out of another airport when the engine quit and he had to make his first emergency landing at a farm nearby. "If you fly long enough, you'll have experiences like that sooner or later," he said.

Upon returning to Pratt & Whitney, Stoebel was accepted as an engineer in the JT9D Experimental Engine Test Group, which was developing the engine for the Boeing 747. Stoebel and his team worked to make sure the engines for the planes worked properly and were safe and reliable. It was also around that time that Stoebel met Brenda, who was a secretary at Pratt & Whitney. They've been married for 52 years. Dick loved the job because he loved being around planes and got to travel anywhere he wanted — to places like South Africa, Germany, Switzerland and all over the U.S. Flying planes and building engines seems like a pretty difficult task to most, but Dick said the hardest thing he ever had to do was give a presentation at a big conference in

Los Angeles. In the meantime, Dick, who never stopped enjoying doing mechanical things with his hands, built bikes for his son and daughter and helped them become national BMX champions. "In 1985, my daughter won national No. 1 when she was 13, and my son came in fifteenth in the country," he said. Dick stayed with Pratt & Whitney for 43 years before retiring and moving to The Villages, first as a seasonal resident and then gradually as a full-time Villager. Here, Dick and Brenda enjoy pickleball and dancing. Dick spent a few years as a pickleball instructor and is currently enjoying East Coast Swing dance classes with Brenda. Additionally, he loves working on antique Hot Rods, and currently has a 1932 Ford 5 Window Coupe that took him

eight years to build. Dick also is working through his bucket list. Last year, he published his book, "I'm Almost History," a memoir about his life and career. "I thought it would be nice for my kids, but along the way, I decided I would just publish it," he said. The book can be found on Amazon. Even after working on them and flying them for decades, Dick still finds himself looking up in wonder at airplanes flying overhead. But sometimes the view is different. A few years ago, he went to Merritt Island and performed aerobatics in a 1940 WACO UPF-7 biplane. Next, he took a helicopter lesson in Kissimmee and is planning to return this fall to fly a P-51 Mustang. "My wife just stays on the ground and waves," Dick said.

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