



# 99s meet for 'Fun and Fellowship Down Under'

*PENNY BELWORTHY reports*

The final day of the International 99s conference in Christchurch featured a New Zealand Aviation Day hosted by Pam and Ces Collings at Forest Field. More than 300 members attended. The annual conference is a chance for licensed women pilots from all over the world to come together and get to know others in the same field as themselves. It is a time to make new friends, catch up on old ones, support those that are new to the industry and share the wisdom and experiences of those that have been flying for years.

The Ninety-Nines, Inc. is an international organisation of licensed women pilots from 35 countries. Currently membership exceeds 5,500 members world wide. It was founded on November 2, 1929, at Curtiss Field, Long Island, New York at an inaugural meeting of 117 American female pilots invited to assemble for mutual support and the advancement of aviation. In 1931, Amelia Earhart was elected as first President and the group was named the ninety-nines for the 99 charter members.

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*Left: Nancy Bird Walton, Patron for the Ninety-Nines, with New Zealand 747-400 pilot Thyra Blaom standing in front of the Pearse Replica.*

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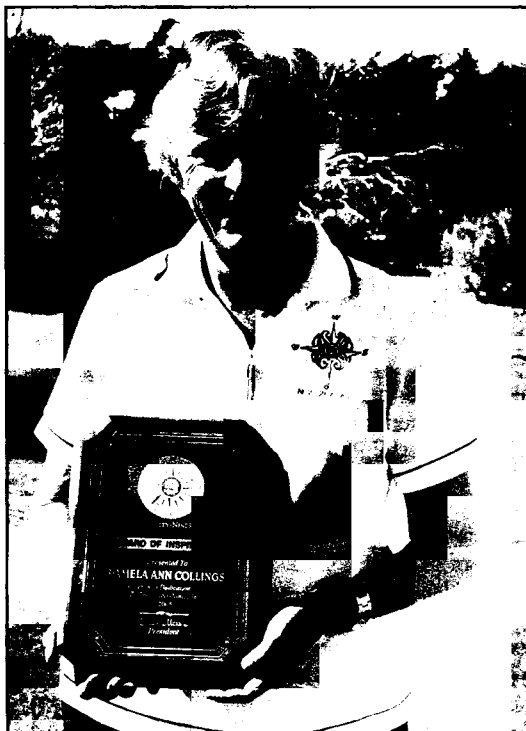
Today 99's are professional pilots for airlines, industry and government; they are pilots who teach and pilots who fly for pleasure; they are pilots who are technicians and mechanics. But first and foremost, they are women who love to fly!

Among these experienced pilots was the current patron of the 99s - Nancy Bird Walton, a world famous aviatrix whose first instructor was Charles Kingsford Smith in 1933. Two years later hired to operate an air ambulance service in outback New South Wales flying a Gipsy Moth. She then went on to found the Australian Women Pilots' Association in 1950 and remained their president until 1990.

The 99's four-and-a-half day event in New Zealand was packed with a huge variety of activities to suit all tastes, from Hot Air Ballooning to sightseeing trips to nearby Akaroa or Hanmer Springs, walking tours and skyline gondola rides. Along with the 99s business matters that needed to be attended to,

including the AGM, there was still time to attend three relevant aeronautical seminars. These included topics that were particularly to New Zealand like coping with our changeable weather when flying.

For many of the attending 99s, the highlight of the conference was the trip out to the country



to see how lucky we are in New Zealand being able to have our planes at our own backdoor and to fly when we want, a concept that many found amazing. The 'Aviation Day' started with a welcome to Forest Field by Pam Collins who is the Governor for the New Zealand Section of the 99's. Then there was a chance for the visitors to wander around the craft market and the static display aircraft including the replica of Richard Pearse's first aircraft. Following lunch a flying display of some local aircraft commenced showing the attributes of various classic types including Tiger Moth, Auster and a formation of three Chipmunks. These were followed with a great handling display of the Canterbury Aero Club's Piper Cub and the locally based Harvard. Representing the lighter aircraft was a Bantam microlight and the Woody Pusher homebuilt. Final turn was a very impressive handling display of a Cresco topdresser aircraft.

*Above left: Pam Collins is the Section Governor and the 2005 International Conference Convenor. At the conference Pam was presented with the Award of Inspiration by the 99's for her encouragement and promotion of women in aviation. She consistently stimulates others to chase their aviation dreams.*



*Left: International Friendship, from left, Russian pilot Liubov Rylova, USA 747-400 pilot for Atlas Air, Aileen Watkins, Kiwi Thyra Blaom and 99's International President Elaine Morrow. Their motto "a smile is the same in any language".*



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