






Leon E. "Tony" Barnum

1920 - 2016 [v](#) Obituary [>](#) Condolences [>](#) Gallery

RESOURCES

-  [More Obituaries for Leon Barnum](#)
-  [Looking for an obituary for a different person with this name?](#)
-  [Barnum Records \(36\)](#)



(News story) Leon E. "Tony" Barnum, a pilot and adventurer who flew vintage aircraft across oceans and ice caps and for decades owned an aviation business where he taught pilots and mechanics and stoked the ardor of flight enthusiasts, died Wednesday in his Waterville Township home. He was 95.

His son, Eric Barnum, president and owner of what is now Crow Executive Air, said his father had congestive heart failure and diabetes, but that the exact cause of death had not been determined.

Mr. Barnum and his wife, Jeane, moved to Toledo from Alpena, Mich., in 1951 when he took a position with what was then Walter R. Crow Inc. He later took ownership of the firm, which became a fixed-base operator at Toledo Express Airport, selling fuel and repairing planes and providing flight instruction, among other services. For years, Mr. Barnum's business was the distributor in the area of Piper aircraft.

"It's the end of an era, that's for sure," said Bill David, an airline pilot who in September, 1972, gave his age as 18 - not 17 - to work for Mr. Barnum at Crow. "There will be no other Tony Barnums. He was a hands-on guy. It was a case of a fella who ran a business who actually knew what the business was.

"I couldn't wait to get to work," Mr. David said. "There were legions of pilots out there who learned to fly from Tony Barnum, flying airliners or [for] corporations. You could learn the trade of fixing and flying airplanes, and you could make a few bucks while you were doing it."

Eric Barnum in 1992 bought the elder Mr. Barnum's interest in Crow, now with headquarters at Toledo Executive Airport, the former Metcalf Field, in Wood County's Lake Township.

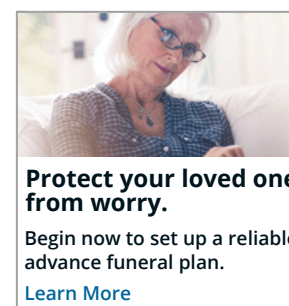
Mr. Barnum became renowned in aviation circles for his skill and daring, which included flying under the Craig Memorial Bridge on the Maumee River.

"We all learned at the foot of the great Tony Barnum," said Brian McMahon, president of Danberry National Ltd., a commercial real estate business, a pilot, and a longtime friend.

Mr. Barnum entertained friends, students, and



Let their legacy live
 Fight diabetes in their memory.
MAKE A MEMORIAL DONATION



Protect your loved one from worry.
 Begin now to set up a reliable advance funeral plan.
[Learn More](#)



Funeral Etiquette
 Expert advice do and say w someone die:

associates with his stories, "somewhat embellished ... but based on a strong foundation of personal experience," said Mr. McMahon, who flew with Mr. Barnum to the Arctic Circle and to a salmon camp at Goose Bay, Labrador, in Canada.

Mr. Barnum regularly took Toledo-area captains of industry and finance on hunting and fishing adventures to remote corners of Canada, often in craft that could land on water if necessary. His own adventures could almost be told through newspaper headlines: Ancient Air Amphibian Gets New Lease On Life; Toledoan Ending 8,000-mile Flight With Amphibian Purchased in Fijis; Discovery of Treasure In Cactus Grove Leads to Man's Flight Across U.S. in 1920s Biplane and, in the mid-1990s, Veteran pilot restores veteran planes.

And so Crow employees always found something interesting going on, his son said - plans afoot for the next hunting trip or a vintage plane being made over.

"He was a taskmaster, but he was an exciting taskmaster," his son said.

In July, 1980, Mr. Barnum was pilot of a vintage amphibious airplane that crashed as it tried to land in the Maumee River in downtown Toledo. The plane flipped, and a passenger who was trapped underwater died while Mr. Barnum was able to swim to shore. He was found guilty in Toledo Municipal Court of vehicular homicide and received a six-month suspended jail sentence. His pilot's license was suspended for 30 days.

He told The Blade in 2002 that the engine quit and he had to ditch the plane before he had time to retract the wheels. He said he had little choice but to try a water landing, but added: "It's the only thing that I think about that I would not want to do again."

He was born Oct. 11, 1920, in Bridgeville, N.Y., to Indera and Leon Barnum. He attended Monmouth College in Illinois on a football scholarship, but also undertook pilot training as [World War II](#) approached. He enlisted in the Navy during his sophomore year.

Assigned to aviation, his son said, Mr. Barnum was posted at Traverse City, Mich., where the Navy was working on its secret "glomb" project - a combination of the words "glider" and "bomb" - intended to deliver bombs to targets without exposing flight crews to enemy defenses. Mr. Barnum flew daily as a test pilot and was among the few naval aviators certified to fly any plane in the Navy's fleet, his son said.

He was discharged in 1946 with the rank of lieutenant and settled in his wife's hometown of Alpena. He started aviation-related businesses, including one of the first commuter airlines in Michigan, and owned a potato chip company.

When not hunting, fishing, or flying, he liked to ski the slopes of northwestern Lower Michigan or Sun Valley.

He and his wife married June 26, 1943. She died July 26, 2012.

Surviving are his daughters, Katherine Jones and Elizabeth Barnum; son, Eric Barnum; four grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

Services are to be private, his son said.

The family suggests tributes to Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 582, Boy Scouts of America, or the Atlantic Salmon Federation, Calais, Maine.

This is a news story by Mark Zaborney. Contact him at: mzaborney@theblade.com or 419-724-6182.



Published in Toledo Blade on Apr. 15, 2016

REMEMBER

Share memories or express condolences below.

[VIEW ALL](#)

Add a memory or condolence to the guest book

[ADD MESSAGE](#)

"Boppa (Tony)... Made a permanent impression on my life..."

-Charles Lawrence

"I go my start with Tony. Worked for him for 1 year in 1962..."

-Rollin Martin

[View All Messages](#) 20



[ADD PHOTOS](#)



[ADD VIDEOS](#)



