

# Lifestyle

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## Lifeline

### CELEBRITYWATCH



AP

Ozzy Osbourne and his family, including wife Sharon, right, and daughter Kelly and son Jack, will host the first MTV Australian Video Awards today.

### Ozzy sends best wishes to Prince Charles

ALICE SPRINGS, Australia — Ozzy Osbourne sent his congratulations to Prince Charles on his upcoming marriage to Camilla Parker Bowles.

Charles was in Alice Springs Wednesday during a five-day tour of Australia that has been overshadowed by scrutiny of his wedding to Parker Bowles, which has fazed some observers because the couple's romance began before Princess Diana died.

Osbourne weighed in on the issue while in Sydney to host the first MTV Australia Video Music Awards, calling Charles a "mate" and saying he should be allowed to marry Parker Bowles in peace.

"It's his business you know. His first wife got killed so what's he expected to do, be single for the rest of his life? If he likes her and she likes him or whatever, good luck on them," Osbourne, the former lead singer of Black Sabbath, told reporters.

The royal wedding date is April 8.

— The Associated Press

► More Celebrity Watch 3D

## MARK YOUR

## CALENDAR

### Garden Gallery annual event slated

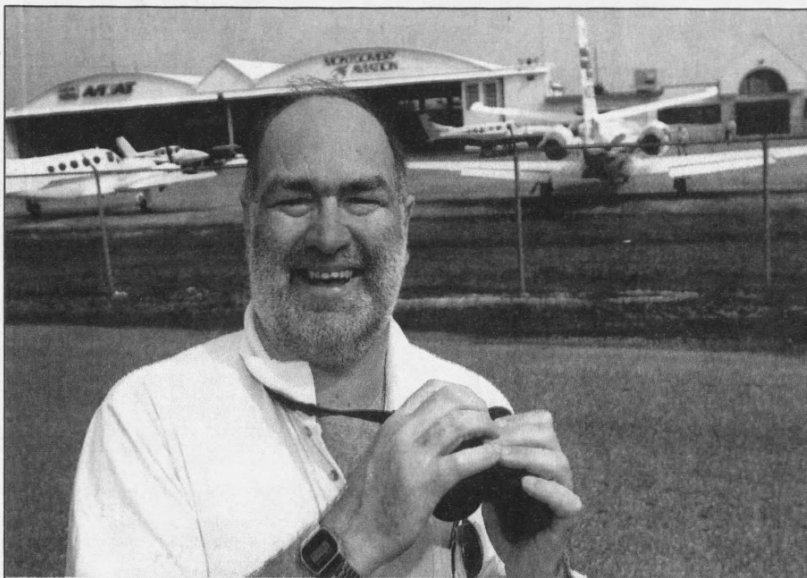
The third annual Montgomery Garden Gallery, presented by Southern Homes & Gardens and the *Montgomery Advertiser*, will be this weekend at the Union Station Train Shed. The event will benefit the American Red Cross.

John Floyd, vice president and editor of *Southern Living*, will be this year's featured speaker. He will give his talk at 10 a.m. Saturday. Other speakers include Dr. Austin Hagan of Auburn University at 2 p.m. and a representative from Al's Flowers at 3 p.m.

On Sunday, Wayne Henderson of SH&G will give a talk titled "What's in a name?" at 2 p.m., and Sara Sprattling will talk about floral arranging at 3 p.m.

As in the past two years, there will be dozens of vendors selling all types of home and garden items, including plants, statuary and hand-crafted items.

One change this year is the price: Tickets are \$5 per



Photos by Karen S. Doerr Advertiser

Chris Mahaffy stands in front of Montgomery Aviation at Dannelly Field. Mahaffy is one of a small group of airplane watchers who stakes out a position and keep track of what he sees.

# Head in the Clouds

## Local man spends hours indulging in unique hobby — plane spotting

By Nick Thomas  
Special to the Advertiser

For most people, waiting hours at an airport for a connecting flight probably ranks right up there with a trip to the dentist, or grappling with a tax form on April 14. But for one Montgomery man, airports are a haven of fascination and enjoyment.

"I first became interested in aircraft when I went through London's Heathrow airport as a young child," said Chris Mahaffy, 51, and a native of Ireland. "Seeing all the planes from so many different countries with their colorful markings really impressed me. And flying was very glamorous in those early days."

Over the past 40 years, Mahaffy has spanned the globe dozens of times not just flying on airplanes, but searching for them. A chemistry professor at Auburn University Montgomery since 1981, he says the hobby is affectionately known in Europe as "air spotting" or "plane spotting."

He says the hobby likely began during World War II with the British Royal Observer Corps watching for German aircraft fly-

ing over the southern coast of England.

"The spotters would report the information to the Royal Air Force," he said. "Of course, it wasn't a hobby then, but they could probably be considered the first plane spotters."

Jimmy Nanney, a student of WWII and a longtime friend of Mahaffy's, said he believes that's why some Americans don't get into the hobby as much as Europeans do.

"This hobby seemed very strange to me until I realized its historical significance," Nanney said. "The British Air Force spotters stationed around Southern England helped defeat the German Luftwaffe, and almost certainly prevented the invasion of the U.K. across the channel by the Germans."

"After the war many continued plane spotting as a hobby. I believe spotting is a matter of national pride, since the spotters helped win the 'Battle of Britain,' thus saving their country from invasion and probable defeat. Americans may not appreciate this hobby, because we have never been invaded this way (except maybe in 1812)."

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Mahaffy watches as a Boeing 757 takes off Wednesday at Dannelly Field. He is one of about 100 plane spotters who live in the United States.

## TELEVISION



AP

Michael E. Knight of "All My Children" won a Daytime Emmy for supporting actor in 2001. "All My Children" leads this year's list with 18 nominations.

## 'Children' dominates Daytime Emmys

By David Bauder  
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — ABC's "All My Children" earned a leading 18 Daytime Emmy nominations Wednesday, while "The View" and "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" both had 11 in talk show categories.

DeGeneres' show won last year's award for best talk show — in its freshman season — and will be competing in that category this year against "The View," "Live With Regis & Kelly," "Dr. Phil" and "Soap Talk."

"All My Children" will compete for best drama series, with its star Michael E. Knight nominated for best actor along with Roger Howarth of "As the World Turns." Jack Wagner of "The Bold and the Beautiful," Steve Burton of "General Hospital," Grant Aleksander of "Guiding Light" and Christian Jules LeBlanc of "The Young and the Restless."

Oddly, the eight nominees for best actress didn't include anyone from "All My Children" or seemingly perennial nominee Susan Lucci.

The best actress nominees are: Martha Byrne, "As the World Turns"; Susan Flannery, "The Bold and the Beautiful"; Nancy Lee Grahn, "General Hospital"; Kim Zimmer, "Guiding Light"; Erika Szlezak and Kassie DePaiva, "One Life to Live"; Juliet Mills, "Passions"; and Michelle Stafford, "The Young and the Restless."

"Martha Stewart Living" received three nominations. She's being released from prison at the end of this week and, if she wants, can ask federal probation officials for permission to attend the awards ceremony. CBS will televise the 32nd annual awards on May 20.

## ONLINE EXTRA

Find out if your favorite daytime show is nominated for a Daytime Emmy.

montgomeryadvertiser.com

# Clouds: Traveling a big part of man's unique plane spotting hobby

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Mahaffy agrees, saying while the hobby is popular in Britain, Germany, France and Switzerland, "most Americans do not have a clue about it."

He estimates that there are probably only about 100 true plane spotters in the entire U.S. However, thousands of European plane spotters visit U.S. airports every year.

To maintain his hobby, Mahaffy will climb aboard a plane, several times a month, and fly off for the weekend. But not to some exotic sun-drenched beach, a glitzy casino, or spectacular national park. His destination is usually a noisy, congested airport terminal where he can catch a glimpse of a long sought-after aircraft, even if just for a few precious minutes.

And according to his wife, Amy, "he'll often just fly off for a day trip, leaving before I get up and be back again before dinner time."

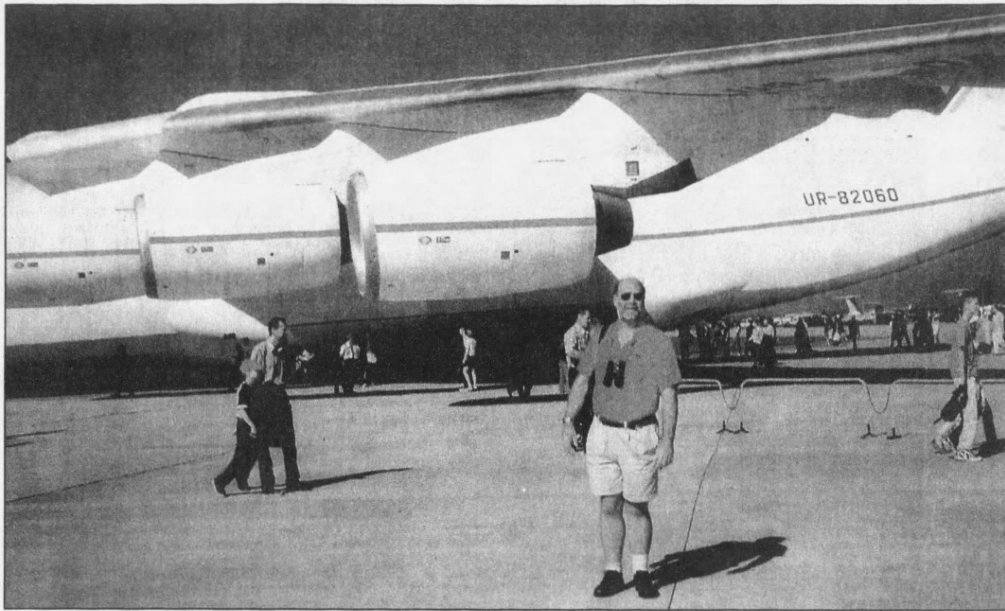
When planning for longer vacations, he will often astound airline reservationists by booking the most complicated routes, and requesting as many stopovers as possible.

"Probably my longest was a round trip from Ireland to Japan in 1977: Belfast-London-Doha-Columbo-Hong Kong-Taipei-Tokyo-Osaka-Tokyo-Taipei-Hong Kong-Jakarta-Kuala Lumpur-Perth-Bombay-Rome-London-Belfast."

With flight itineraries like that, it's not surprising Mahaffy has clocked some impressive frequent flyer miles. His pursuit of aircraft has taken him to every state in the union, except Idaho and North Dakota, and to more than three dozen countries. He estimates he has flown more than two and a half million miles, and seen about 90 percent of the world's large commercial aircraft.

Judd Katz, a retired lieutenant colonel from the Air Force Reserves, says he has met few civilians with Mahaffy's depth of knowledge of aviation.

"Chris often brings me back photographs of usual aircraft from all over the world," he said. "In fact, every plane that I had seen in the Air Force, or even later in documentaries on the History Channel, Chris had seen it or photographed it."



Contributed

Chris Mahaffy stands in front of a Ukrainian Antonov AN-225 in Moscow. The plane is the biggest aircraft in the world and was built to carry the Russian space shuttle.

And Col. Bob Taffet, an experienced pilot who flew more than 170 combat missions during the Vietnam War, says Mahaffy's aircraft knowledge is "extensive."

"He is able to pick up very subtle differences in aircraft models," Taffet said, "especially commercial type aircraft."

Nanney tested Mahaffy's knowledge a few years back with a trick question. He sent the plane spotter an altered picture he had taken of a plane at a Charlotte airport.

"I used photo software to change the numbers on the tail and sent it to Chris. He concluded that I must have altered the picture since no such plane existed and wrote me back describing the type plane, the year it was made, what it is used for and who owned it."

"From our conversations it

seemed to me that Chris knew just about every airplane on the planet and had seen most of them."

So what exactly do plane spotters like Chris Mahaffy do at airports? Apart from just watching the planes take off and photographing them, their main goal is to record and catalog the aircraft information.

"We make notes and drink lots of coffee," Mahaffy said. "And we like hotels with good views. For example, the top floors at the O'Hare Hilton have great views — of the aircraft!"

Chris' own records date back to June 6, 1965, to his days in Belfast.

"I have now gathered huge amounts of data, and many boxfuls of records," he said. "Most plane spotters keep records of the type of plane they see, its color scheme, the airline name, the

date, and of course the aircraft numbers."

All plane spotters are very serious about recording aircraft numbers.

"There's a frame number like a car's VIN number, that usually never changes," said Mahaffy. "And a registration number, like the licence plate of a car, which can change during the life of the aircraft."

He says if you know the code, it's very easy to identify the nationality of an aircraft. "Every country has a unique prefix. The U.S. is 'N' followed by a sequence of numbers and letters." Other countries include: G for Great Britain, F for France and B for China.

Mahaffy says many enthusiasts will also try to see entire company fleets, such as all of Delta's aircraft. Others may concentrate on just commercial or

military aircraft, while some are only interested in biz-jets, light planes, or Russian aircraft. But the real experts, according to Mahaffy, want to see every one of a particular model of aircraft, such as all the DC-9s or Boeing 747s ever built.

John Hamilton, who now works for Hamilton Associates in Bardstown, Ky., frequently accompanied Mahaffy to conferences during the 20 years they worked together at AUM.

"At the time he had seen every plane in the United fleet except one," Hamilton recalled.

"And on one occasion we were driving by Dannelly Field and Chris got particularly excited when he saw a rare transport taking off. He jammed on the brakes, and literally leapt out of the car with his binoculars and notepad to record the aircraft number."

Mahaffy says plane spotters

also have their own terminology. "We speak a different language when together, which non-spotters wouldn't understand, especially the names for certain aircraft."

For instance, Mahaffy calls a 737 a "pig," and a 747 a "lump." Light aircraft are referred to as "Spam cans." A telescope is known as a "pole" and binoculars are called "bins." In fact, "poles" and "bins" are two of the important tools of the trade which make it fairly easy to spot a plane spotter at an airport.

"Look for someone toting notebooks, pencils, scanners, binoculars or telescopes, a laptop and a camera," suggests Mahaffy. But since 9/11, he says anyone carrying around such a collection of hardware is likely to attract the interest of airport security.

In fact, he has very nearly been arrested several times as police monitored his movements through a terminal while he was loaded down with electronics.

"Some seem to think we are spies," he said. "One time I was just plane spotting to the police at Chicago's Midway airport."

It's times like that when Amy Mahaffy is glad she doesn't accompany her husband on all his plane spotting expeditions.

"But when we do travel together, I'm happy to head off shopping or to the beach while Chris does his thing at the airport," Amy said. "My only stipulation is that we spend some time together sightseeing."

Mahaffy's wife knows the aviation business pretty well herself. She has worked for Delta Air Lines for six years.

"For someone who has never worked in this field, his knowledge about aircraft and the aviation industry is amazing," she said.

And over the years, anyone who's heard Chris Mahaffy discussing his unusual hobby would probably agree. Most, however, can't help wondering about the fascination for collecting aircraft information.

"It's very hard to answer," he says. "Why do people collect stamps? It's really the thrill of filling in a gap on a list to make that list complete. I just happen to like recording aircraft sightings."

And as far as budgeting for all the air travel, Mahaffy's philosophy is quite simple: "Thank goodness for frequent flyer miles, and a wife who works for Delta!"

Nick Thomas teaches at Auburn University Montgomery. His feature stories appear in newspapers throughout the country. He can be reached by e-mail at [nthomas@mail.aum.edu](mailto:nthomas@mail.aum.edu)

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