

An Ingenious Idea: Drive-in Air Shows

As North American air shows move more deeply into the second month of pandemic-required cancellations, virtual air shows are popping up as temporary replacements.

The first virtual air show of the pandemic era was the Chef Pitts Online Air Show, presented by AirShow 360, on Saturday, April 18. Held over the course of two and a half hours, the event was conceived by ICAS member and air show performer Clemens "Chef Pitts" Kuhlrig who teamed up with L.M. Sawyer of AirShow 360 and air show announcer Bill Walsh. "I was reacting to a lack of air show footage on my Facebook feed," says Kuhlrig. "And it seemed like a good way to thank the fans and involve some of my air show friends." Nearly 40 different performers were showcased during the fast-paced Saturday afternoon event.

Earlier this week, air show announcers Matt Jolley, Rob Reider and Ric Peterson teamed up with Jeff and Bryan Lee at LiveAirShowTV to hold the Socially Distant Air Show on the afternoons of Tuesday, April 21, Wednesday, April 22 and Thursday, April 23. With a total of six broadcast hours and 65 performers, the goal of the event was to have a little fun, engage with air show fans, and raise some money for air show professionals facing financial challenges as a result of the pandemic (see story above). Digital analytics generated by the social media platforms on which the show was broadcast reported total views of 133,866 and an average "watch time" of just over 21 minutes per person. (A note from the virtual show's producers: Videos submitted, but not played during the broadcast will be uploaded onto the Show Center Facebook page over the next several days.)

When the Wings over Columbus Air Show at Columbus AFB in Mississippi was forced to cancel their April 25-26 show, organizers re-grouped and organized their own virtual show, which was broadcast from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. today, Friday, April 24. Like the other virtual air shows already held, the Wings over Columbus Virtual Air Show was a thoughtful and heartfelt response to

an unprecedented situation. And, like the Chef Pitts Online Air Show and the Socially Distant Air Show, it worked in large part because of the passion and enthusiasm that supported it.

Later today (7:00 p.m. EDT/4:00 p.m. PDT), the organizers of the SUN 'n FUN Aerospace Expo will launch "SUN 'n FUN: The Home Edition," an "on-line experience" that will seek to recreate a portion of what spectators see and hear when they attend the annual event in Lakeland, Florida. Originally scheduled for March 31 to April 5, SUN 'n FUN was an early victim of the pandemic. But, over the last couple of weeks, the show's staff has been hard at work on a website portal that will give visitors access to a wide range of virtual SUN 'n FUN programming, including interviews, virtual tours, videotaped aerobatic performances and more. And SUN 'N FUN will also host its own four-hour virtual air show on Saturday, May 30. To visit "SUN 'n FUN: The Home Edition," [click here](#) sometime after 7:00 p.m. EDT today.

Based on rumors, questions and comments during the last several weeks, all indications are that ICAS members – both event organizers and performers - - will be organizing more virtual air shows during the coming months to maintain contact with their audiences and sponsors, and to stay relevant in their communities.

