

WOUTER'S WHIRLYBIRDS

\$10,000 — Plus to take up a "toy"

by Jane Camm

Beg, borrow or steal. People eager to take Pan-Air Helicopter Limited's commercial pilot course will do anything to dig up the required \$13,500 fee. "It's amazing how quickly students come up with that amount of cash once they've become addicted to flying," said Gil Wouters, co-owner and chief instructor of the school. "People have mortgaged homes or sold cars to get the money." It's all a question of economics, he explained. A world-wide shortage of trained pilots has created a large demand in the field. Course

completion takes two to three months and jobs are almost guaranteed. The school, situated on highway 31 near Metcalfe, is in an ideal location for Wouters. His house is directly across the road so he can walk to work. Flying a helicopter is safer than driving a car; it can land virtually anywhere. Wouters explained that landing in tight places where fixed-wing planes cannot is sometimes dangerous. Most accidents occur close to ground, he said. Wouters has been a pilot for several years. He was hooked

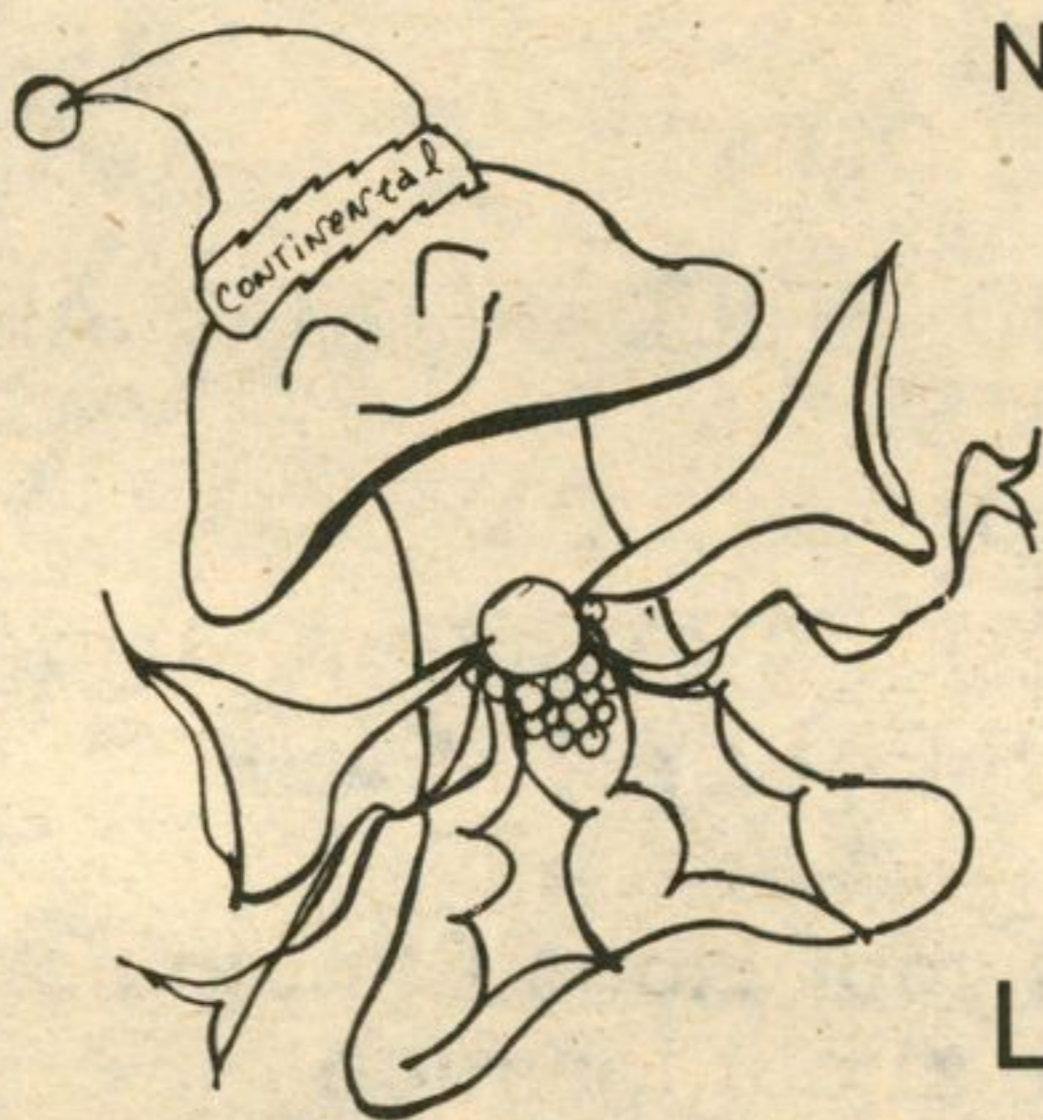
from his first ride and still 'loves' every minute of flying. "Helicopters are really fun to fly. They are limited only by the pilot's imagination." The pilot admitted he looks at helicopters as toys. The company has a fleet of six 'toys' costing \$150,000 to \$300,000 each. Pan-Air is jointly owned by Wouters, his father Andre and Ron Williams. Originally, the Wouters family had intended to build a small private landing strip and buy one helicopter. The idea became a million dollar investment. The school is built on Andre

Wouters' property, adjacent to his home. The younger Wouters claims his father is the financial wizard of the trio. Business is not hindered by the incomplete state of the hangar and offices. Aside from the initial investment, overhead is very high. Wouters would not venture an estimate of total overhead. "The figure would be astronomical," he admitted. Maintenance and operation of the copters plus salaries of six instructors are only part of the overall outlay. Student fees are high for these reasons, Wouters said. In operation for four years, this is the first year any students have been trained. Previous years were spent flying commercially through a licensed subsidiary, Verrault Aviation Inc. There are currently eight students taking the course — all of them men. "Foe every call we receive from a man, we get one from a woman.

No women have signed up so far." Most courses are taught during the winter while summers are spent flying commercially. Wouters proudly claims his 'toys' are well travelled. The average person may never take a helicopter ride. The impressive dream of buying a helicopter coupled by the equally unfathomable prospect of renting one, would discourage anyone. At a rental fee of \$350 an hour a helicopter enthusiast could be set back about \$1,000 for a short trip, said Wouters. There is hope yet for the eager but poor helicopter buff. The Ottawa Flying Club holds an annual Fly Day each fall. Anyone can get high for \$5. All money raised goes to Ottawa's crippled children. Wouters warned greenhorns to use extreme caution. Many are sold on the first take-off and cannot rest until they beg, borrow or steal enough money to take the course.

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Cancer Committee anxious to serve

The Russell Branch of the Canadian Cancer Society received its charter at a recent meeting of the Eastern Ontario Cancer Society at Algonquin College. The local Branch then secured the support of a sponsor and entertained a group of 27 ladies at Russell United Church Oct. 16. The ladies had campaigned last spring raising over \$2,000 to continue the fight against the world's most dread disease. The dinner was a small token of appreciation for the campaign workers. The local cancer committee is anxious to be of service to cancer patients in Russell. Should anyone

require medical assistance or transportation to hospital for treatment, they are asked to contact the service to patient coordinator, Pat Warner at 445-2983. Similarly, the Russell Branch is able to provide guest speakers to address meetings of local service organizations. In this regard call Eric King at 445-5478.

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