

History of The Heartland Organization of Rocketry

By Richard Burney and Bruce Lee

Updated May 2008

Note: Bruce Lee originally wrote the opening historical information below back in the 1990's. At first it was written for the original separate web page for Tripoli Nebraska. When THOR came into existence in early 1998, Bruce added some THOR relative historical points. Since many more things have happened in this club and hobby during the subsequent decade (1998-2008), I have gone back through and have significantly updated the THOR/ORC/Tripoli Nebraska story and will try to update and maintain it in the future. - Richard Burney

The Tripoli Nebraska Prefecture...

Tripoli Nebraska was formed in October 1991. There were 3 Tripoli members in Nebraska at the time: Kevin Urbom, Bruce Lee and Mike Pazderka. Kevin called Bruce and said, "Let's form a prefecture." Mike and Bruce worked together, talked it over, talked with Kevin and decided to go for it. All we had to do was get someone certified. So, Mike and Bruce decided to go to Danville and get certified. Bruce certified on a NCR Katana and Mike certified on a LOC Heavy Duty Beauty. There they met Dennis LaMothe and Art Markowitz who ran HQ at the time and after Bruce and Mike were certified they set up Tripoli Nebraska. (*Note: the biggest motor flown at this Danville was an I motor*). There were over 100 flyers in attendance and there was one "J" motor flight planned with much anticipation. In those days a J motor was rare to see fly.

Bruce Lee became Prefect. Kevin couldn't make it to Danville, but he wanted to become certified. So the first official launch of Tripoli Nebraska was held in late November 1991 at Beaver City, Nebraska. It was 40 degrees and there was 6 inches of snow on the ground. There were 2 members in attendance, Kevin and Bruce and there were a total of 4 flights. Kevin's first attempt at certifying was on a LOC Mini-Magg, which had a tangled chute and busted a fin. Kevin epoxied the fin back on (*5 minute epoxy takes a while to set up at 40 degrees*) and flew it again to get his certification. Bruce launched his NCR Katana twice, the second flight with a cluster of 7 motors, an H73 and 6 D12-0's. This flight led to Bruce's first *High Power Rocketry* magazine article, "Clustering for Beginners, Part 1."

Out of the original group of three, Kevin Urbom went on to become the last volunteer Tripoli corporate lawyer. Bruce Lee went on to become the "Tripoli Report" editor, national board member, Tripoli national Secretary, then Tripoli national Treasurer and President of The Heartland Organization of Rocketry. Kevin dropped out of Tripoli in 1993.

In the spring of 1992 Tripoli Nebraska doubled with the addition of 3 new members; David and Mick Neville, and Scott Meinhardt. Bruce and Mike traveled back to spring Danville and got to be good friends with Rocket R & D (*before it was sold to Gary Buck*). David and Mick Neville went to a KLOUDBusters launch and got their certifications. Tony Cochran was the next to join in 1992. Tony would later become the first member of THOR to become a lifetime member.

The next Tripoli Nebraska launch was moved to Arapahoe, Nebraska airport in the summer of 1992. All of the members mentioned so far were in attendance except for Mike Pazderka. This launch started out with a visit from the police, which gave us all a scare, until we found out the sheriff was a friend of Kevin's. The rocketry world got the first view of the now famous "Dr. Mario" rocket of Bruce Lee. It had a perfect flight on a J800 AeroTech reload.

There were 2 more Arapahoe launches and the end of using the Arapahoe launch site with Kevin dropping out of Tripoli. A memorable, but sad, moment at the second to last launch there with Scott Meinhardt getting sick with Tony and Bruce having to take him to the hospital.

Tripoli Nebraska just kept growing. In 1993 we picked up new members from Iowa and Kansas. With the loss of Kevin Urbom we had no launch site for 1993 so we traveled. Two launches in Kansas, LDRS 12 in Kansas and 2 launches at Danville. At LDRS 12, Bruce Lee was made editor of the "Tripoli Report."

In 1994 we picked up Mike Collins from South Dakota, who went on to form the rocket motor dealership "Midwest AeroModeler." (*With increasing federal regulations setting in, Mike*

would later dissolve *Midwest AeroModeler* in the early 2000's). Mike Haigh joined from Iowa and we had a new launch site at Harlan, Iowa which served through 1994.

In 1995 we found, thanks to member Perry Lambert, our first really good launch site at Exeter, Nebraska. Then with the addition of Mark Uhlenkamp to the group we had a second really good launch site in Westside, Iowa. Also, Bruce Lee ran for and won a seat on the Tripoli Board of Directors and became the national Secretary.

In 1996 with the addition of Larry Drake, we had another excellent launch site in Pickrell, Nebraska and Bruce Anderberry set up a launch site for one launch in Axtell, Nebraska. Now we had a problem most prefectures wish they had, too many good launch sites. They covered our geographic area pretty well with a 5-hour driving spread between the 2 farthest launch sites, Axtell to Westside.

The selection of Hartsel, Colorado as the launch site for LDRS 16 in 1997 started the planning for the first group project for Tripoli Nebraska in late 1996. This was the beginning for the now famous "Nebraska Heat" project and really brought the group closer with all of the planning and construction and kicked off our first actual Tripoli Nebraska group meeting which wasn't held at a launch.

1997 saw the biggest turnout of Tripoli Nebraska members at an LDRS and the successful flight of *Nebraska Heat* which also proved to be a first for anyone to airstart an M class motor in a cluster. Mark Uhlenkamp replaced Bruce Lee as the Tripoli Nebraska Prefect. Larry Drake flew the world record for a successful cluster consisting of 269 motors. Bruce Lee certified level 3 with "Super Mario." Another great launch site was tested at Breda, Iowa in November.

The Omaha Rocket Club...

In 1994, John Carroll (*a former engineer of Estes Industries and manager of the then new La Vista, Nebraska HobbyTown*), Jim Piunti and several others in the Omaha area formed a local model rocketry club – the Omaha Rocket Club (*very early on it was the Omaha Model Rocket Club*). Throughout the next few years, ORC would hold launches on almost a weekly basis at several different fields in the Papillion/La Vista area. A monthly meeting was held the first week of each month (*originally the first Wednesday, then later the first Tuesday*) at the La Vista HobbyTown from 1994 to the fall of 1996. Business meetings were held at the La Vista Summer Kitchen Café and at other restaurants and locations. During 1994 and 1995, Jim Piunti was the editor of ORC's newsletter.

1996 was a major year in the future development of the club. ORC saw the first time use of the soccer fields south of 66th and Harrison. A few years later, those soccer fields became the primary sport model rocketry field for THOR and would remain so until 2006. After a nearly half year hiatus of the club newsletter, Bruce Lee took on the responsibility of editing the club newsletter. Starting in October, ORC's monthly meeting was moved to the La Vista Community Center; this remains the club meeting place to this very day. It was also in the fall of 1996 that ORC achieved the status of NAR Section making it apparently the first NAR Section to exist in the state of Nebraska.

The Heartland Organization of Rocketry...

Though Tripoli Nebraska and the Omaha Rocket Club were totally separate entities, the borders between both groups blurred during this time. Many members of Tripoli Nebraska had become involved with ORC and vice versa. Both organizations' activities were planned to work around each other. Though it was a Tripoli Nebraska project, the *Nebraska Heat* rocket was opened for ORC members to be involved. It was quite clear that both the NAR and Tripoli groups were pretty much becoming one organization.

By the end of 1997, the ball got rolling to bring both Tripoli Nebraska and ORC under one umbrella group. After a number of names were suggested, the acronym of **THOR** – **The Heartland Organization Rocketry** – was picked along with a logo created by Arley Davis. Though this was now one big club, the Tripoli Nebraska Prefecture and the ORC NAR Section would continue to exist to serve the needs of THOR's Tripoli and NAR members. (*Note:*

eventually ORC would be replaced by THOR as the NAR section name). New officer positions were created and filled. Model and high power rocketry was about to enter a new era in southeast Nebraska/southwest Iowa!

THOR Yearly Highlights...

Below are some of the key highlights and events that have taken place since THOR came into existence in early 1998. This list will be added to and expanded as time goes by.

1998

THOR Officers:

President – *Rob Skiba, David Fields, Larry Drake*

Vice President – *David Fields, Bruce Lee*

Treasurer – *Larry Drake*

Secretary – *Bruce Lee*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Mark Uhlenkamp*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Arley Davis*

Newsletter Editor – *Bruce Lee*

Highlights

As the result of numerous peoples' efforts, **Tripoli Nebraska** and the **Omaha Rocket Club** are brought under one umbrella organization – **The Heartland Organization of Rocketry (THOR)**.

Tripoli Nebraska member **Bruce Furan** died from Multiple Sclerosis around the beginning of the year.

THOR's first regional launch, **Fire on the Farm**, was held at our launch site at Breda, Iowa. Besides being THOR's first regional launch, the **Iowa Society of Amateur Rocketeers (I-SOAR)** also was heavily involved in running this event. Fire on the Farm was held on Saturday April 4th though Sunday the 5th. A total of 182 flights were done by 55 registered flyers.

Another regional launch, **Nebraska Heat**, was held on the weekend of October 17th and 18th at our Pickrell site. The first Nebraska Heat launch was dedicated to the memory of Bruce Furan.

1999

THOR Officers:

President – *Bruce Lee*

Vice President – *Arley Davis*

Treasurer – *Larry Drake*

Secretary – *Richard Burney*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Mark Uhlenkamp*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Arley Davis*

Newsletter Editor – *Bruce Lee*

Highlights

Fire on the Farm 2 was held on the weekend of April 17th and 18th at the Breda site. 212 flights were done by 64 flyers making this the biggest and most successful launch in THOR's history.

With **LDRS 18** being held at Argonia, Kansas it was a guarantee that there would be a large THOR turnout. For this LDRS, **Bruce Lee** led up the effort for what (to date) has been THOR's only group project ever – a 1/3rd scale **Mercury Redstone** which represented Alan Shepard's Freedom 7 flight. The THOR Mercury Redstone was powered by a P13,000 made by John Johnson. The rocket was flown on Monday August 2nd (EX day for LDRS). Due to a flaw in the

motor design, the motor catoed, severely damaging the rocket. Parts of the rocket ended up in the hands of some the team members while the main bulk of the remaining rocket went into storage; what was left of the Mercury Redstone was disposed of in September 2006.

In August, THOR conducted its first experimental launch day. During these early EX days before all the rules were finalized by Tripoli, some of our EX events took place after the end of a commercial flying day.

Nebraska Heat 2 was held the weekend of October 16th and 17th at the Pickrell site. This would be the last Nebraska Heat launch held in the fall.

2000

THOR Officers:

President – *Bruce Lee*

Vice President – *Lyle Woodrum*

Treasurer – *Larry Drake*

Secretary – *Richard Burney*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Mark Uhlenkamp*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Arley Davis*

Newsletter Editor – *Richard Burney, Bruce Lee*

Highlights

Starting with the March/April newsletter, **Richard Burney** assumed the role of newsletter editor from Bruce Lee.

Fire on the Farm 3 was held at our Breda site on Friday April 14th through Sunday the 16th. Though this was suppose to have been our first three-day launch incorporating an experimental/research day, some very odd weather made it otherwise. Friday reached a record high of 80+ degrees, but 30+ MPH winds made things unflyable. The next day the high was 40 degrees cooler and the cloud ceiling was only about 1,000 feet up limiting pretty much everything under J motors; a total of 69 flights happened none the less. Sunday was a complete wash out.

Nebraska Heat 3 was held at our Pickrell site on Friday June 2nd through Sunday the 4th. This would not only mark the first Nebraska Heat to be held during the summer/late spring months, but also the first fully complete three-day launch. A total of over 87 flights took place over the three-day event.

One of Tripoli Nebraska's original members **Scott Meinhardt** passed away on Wednesday August 16th as a result of brain cancer. Scott was just 34 years old.

On September 29th, **Ky Michaelson** and his **CSXT** team made their first attempt at sending a private civilian rocket into space. After reaching 3,203 MPH and an altitude of 8 miles up, the rocket came apart. Besides Ky, numerous other THOR members including **Bruce Lee** and **Tony Cochran** were involved in this and the next two attempts.

2001

THOR Officers:

President – *Bruce Lee*

Vice President – *Arley Davis*

Treasurer – *Larry Drake*

Secretary – *Richard Burney*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Mark Uhlenkamp*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Arley Davis*

Newsletter Editor – *Richard Burney*

Highlights

THOR's very own **Bruce Lee** and **Ky Michaelson** appeared in an episode of TLC's **Junkyard Wars**, "**Sky Rockets**", on Wednesday January 24th. Bruce Lee was part of the **Long Brothers** team while Ky was one of the judges.

Fire on the Farm 4 was held at our Breda site on Friday April 20th through Sunday the 22nd. 5 flights and several static motor burns were conducted on the EX day. 51 flights were held on Saturday. Sunday was a wash out.

Nebraska Heat 4 was held at our Pickrell site on Friday June 22nd through Sunday the 24th.

September 11th – as a result of the terrorist attacks that took place on this date, all high power model rocketry in the country would be prohibited during the next several weeks.

On October 15th, a fire destroyed **AeroTech's** main production facility. This would result in a severe shortage of AeroTech motors over the next few years. During this time, motors manufactured by companies such as **Cesaroni** and **Animal Motor Works** would become popular alternatives.

2002

THOR Officers:

President – *Bruce Lee*

Vice President – *Arley Davis*

Treasurer – *Larry Drake*

Secretary – *Richard Burney*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Kevin Trojanowski*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Arley Davis, Bruce Lee*

Newsletter Editor – *Richard Burney*

Highlights

Fire on the Farm 5 was held on Friday April 12th through the 14th. A total of around 140 flights were made. This would mark the very last launch held at the farm fields near Breda, IA and the last time that we would hold a launch of any sort in Iowa. All of THOR's high power launches have been held at its Pickrell site ever since.

LDRS XXI was held south of Amarillo, TX from Thursday July 11th through Tuesday the 16th. A fair number of THOR's members made the trip to this first LDRS hosted by the **POTROCS**. **Kevin Trojanowski's** famous **Lusty Cornmaiden** made its maiden flight there.

Nebraska Heat 5 was held on Friday August 2nd through Sunday the 4th. Since 2000, this has marked the only Nebraska Heat launch since 2000 to be held in a month other than June.

The second attempt of **Ky Michaelson's CSXT** took place on September 19th. This time the rocket suffered a cato immediately after takeoff resulting in the destruction of the vehicle.

On the evening before Thanksgiving, THOR member **Candy Davis** died as a result of an accidental electrocution. Candy was just 22 years old. Though Candy's involvement in the club was initially through her father Arley, Candy came to many of our launches and was involved with our group projects. She was one of the very few female members of our group at that time. She was both Level 1 and 2 Certified. She is survived by her son **Jacob** and her daughter **Necia**.

2003

THOR Officers:

President – *Bruce Lee*

Vice President – *Greg Rothman*

Treasurer – *Larry Drake*

Secretary – *Richard Burney*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Kevin Trojanowski*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Bruce Lee*

Newsletter Editor – *Richard Burney*

Highlights

Fire on the Farm 6 was held on Friday April 25th through Sunday the 27th. Well over a hundred flights would be conducted over this weekend. This would be the first Fire on the Farm held at our Pickrell site.

Nebraska Heat 6 was held on Friday June 13th through Sunday the 15th.

LDRS 22 was held from Thursday July 17th through Tuesday the 22nd. As typical with Argonia held, KLOUDBuster run LDRS's, there was a sizable number of THOR members there. Notable THOR rockets flown included **Stumpy** (world's tallest model rocket), 316-D11-powered **Maxie D**, the twin M1419 powered porta-potty **Our Stinkin' Rocket**, and the second Level 3 attempt of Kevin's **Lusty Cornmaiden**. **First TV** shot the three-episode program, **Rocket Challenge**, during LDRS 22. Many of the above mentioned rockets appeared in the program and some of THOR's members were part of a team in the "**From the Ground Up**" contest.

2004

THOR Officers:

President – *Bruce Lee*

Vice President – *Greg Rothman*

Treasurer – *Larry Drake*

Secretary – *Richard Burney*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Kevin Trojanowski*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Bruce Lee*

Newsletter Editor – *Richard Burney*

Highlights

Starting with the January/February issue, THOR's newsletter finally had an actual name – **THOR's Hammer**. The name paid tribute to the THOR team and its rocket involved with one of the contests at LDRS 22.

Fire on the Farm 7 was held on Friday April 30th through Sunday May 2nd. A total of about 100 flights took place.

History was made on Monday May 17th when **Ky Michaelson's CSXT/GoFast** rocket became the first private amateur rocket to go into space reaching an altitude of over 70 miles. This was Ky's third attempt. Once again, multiple THOR members including Ky, **Bruce Lee**, and **Tony Cochran** were involved.

Nebraska Heat 7 was held on Friday June 18th through Sunday the 29th. A total of over 140 flights took place.

THOR's October launch was changed to be a two-day launch covering Saturday October 17th through Sunday the 18th. About 125 flights took place over this weekend.

2005

THOR Officers:

President – *Bruce Lee*

Vice President – *Greg Rothman*

Treasurer – *Thomas Kernes*

Secretary – *Richard Burney*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Kevin Trojanowski*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Bruce Lee*

Newsletter Editor – *Richard Burney*

Highlights

Fire on the Farm 8 was held on Friday April 15th through Sunday the 17th. A total of about 119 flights took place over the three-day weekend.

May - **Andrew Wimmer** led a team from West Point/Beemer Junior/Senior High School at this year's **Team America Rocket Challenge**. Andrew's team placed 66th out of 100 contestants.

Nebraska Heat 8 was held on Friday June 17th through Sunday the 19th. A total of about 67 flights took place. Though not many flights, there were four M flights and numerous K and L flights.

Kevin Trojanowski and a team from THOR built and flew a 1/5th scale **Delta III** at **AIRFest 11** at Argonia, Kansas on September 5th.

The now multi-day October launch was expanded to cover a research day; this year's launch ran from Friday October 14th through Sunday the 16th. A total of about 151 flights took place.

2006

THOR Officers:

President – *Bruce Lee*

Vice President – *Greg Rothman*

Treasurer – *Thomas Kernes*

Secretary – *Richard Burney*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Kevin Trojanowski*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Bruce Lee*

Newsletter Editor – *Richard Burney*

Highlights

Fire on the Farm 9 was held on Friday April 21st through Sunday 23rd.

April – Lincoln member **Scott Frasier** passed away from cancer.

May – **Andrew Wimmer** (West Point/Beemer Junior/Senior High School) and **David Austerberry** (Benson High) both led separate teams in 2006's **Team America Rocket Challenge**. Andrew's Team placed 3rd while David's team placed 21st.

Nebraska Heat 9 was held on the weekend of Friday June 16th through Sunday the 18th.

LDRS 25 was held at the **POTROCS'** field south of Amarillo, Texas from Thursday June 29th through Tuesday July 4th. Like the last Amarillo LDRS, quite a few members from THOR were in attendance. This would mark the second flight for the 1/5th scale **Delta III** by **Kevin Trojanowski** and his team.

THOR's multi-day high power launch in October was finally given a name: **Bob**. Yes, just Bob. The first Bob launch was held on the weekend of Friday 20th through Sunday the 22nd. Friday turned out to be a decent day for flying. Saturday was cancelled due to forecasted bad weather. Sunday was primarily a day for Lincoln area scouts and their families to fly.

THOR member **Mark Havel** passed away on November 25th as the result of a brain hemorrhage. Mark was just 43 years old.

2007

THOR Officers:

President – *Greg Rothman*

Vice President – *Nathan Warner*

Treasurer – *Thomas Kernes*

Secretary – *Richard Burney*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Kevin Trojanowski*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Greg Rothman*

Newsletter Editor – *Richard Burney*

Highlights

Fire on the Farm 10 was held on the weekend of Friday April 20th through Sunday the 22nd. Due to bad weather all weekend, only research flying took place on Friday with the next two days being cancelled. With a total of less than 10 flights, this was the worst multi-day high power launch in THOR's history.

A new field for low power sport flying was discovered in the form of a former golf driving range on Lincoln Road west of 84th Street in Papillion. The first launch to take place there was on Sunday April 29th. Starting in June, THOR returned to its tradition of having a low power sport launch on the first Sunday of the month.

Nebraska Heat 10 was held on the weekend of Friday June 15th through Sunday the 17th. A total of 55 flights took place.

LDRS 26 was held at the Jean Dry Lake near Las Vegas, NV from Thursday July 12th through Tuesday the 17th. Though a long distance away, a fair number of THOR's members made the long drive out.

Bob 2 was held the weekend of Friday October 19th through Sunday the 21st.

After nine years as secretary and eight years as the club's newsletter editor, **Richard Burney** retired from both positions at the end of the year. Richard's run as secretary not only made him the longest running officer for a single position in the club, but also the last club officer left from the 1990's. Besides being newsletter editor for eight years, Richard was a heavy contributor to the ORC and THOR newsletters between 1996 and 2000. The hard work Richard put into **THOR's Hammer** resulted in the newsletter being a runner-up for **NAR's LAC Award** in 2004 and 2005.

2008

THOR Officers:

President – *Greg Rothman*

Vice President – *Nathan Warner*

Treasurer – *Thomas Kernes*

Secretary – *Barry Conner*

Tripoli Nebraska Prefect – *Kevin Trojanowski*

NAR Section #562 Leader – *Greg Rothman*

Newsletter Editor – Barry Conner

Fire on the Farm 11 was held on the weekend of Friday April 18th through Sunday 20th. Friday and Sunday's flying was cancelled due to rain, but Saturday proved to be a great day for flying with lots of sun and little wind. The event was highlighted by several flights cracking the 10,000 foot mark.