



Copters Prove Too Much To Bear

BY KATY GURLEY

It's hard to say when the last straw was for Frank Dalene. It might have been the evening a helicopter swooped down over a picture-perfect wedding he was attending and drowned out the couple's wedding vows. Or maybe it was the time he heard the familiar shattering noise of a helicopter and looked up over his house and saw the belly of the aircraft just a few feet from his roof.

Whenever the moment was, and there have been hundreds of them, Mr. Dalene, a home builder, made up his mind that the East Hampton Town Airport should be closed to commercial flights.

"My preference is to eliminate the commercial operation at the airport that started 5 to 10 years ago. When I built my house 25 years ago, the airport was for private use only," he said this week.

In the past month, with the help of volunteers, he rounded up neighbors who live within a mile or two of the airport and got 100 of them to sign a petition that says, in part, that the "noise impact of commercial operations of airplanes and helicopters violates the intent and spirit of the [noise] zoning laws." The petition will be sent to the Town Board.

Mr. Dalene has also created a website, www.ehhelicopternoise.com, where he has the petition posted, along with letters and photos. He said he's also received interest from a loose coalition of 138 people from Sag Harbor and Southampton.

"My whole idea is to form a coalition of different organizations who are united against this helicopter noise. If people can band together we have a better chance of making a difference," he said in an interview last week.

Marie Zerilli, who lives on Bark Court near Mr. Dalene is the volunteer who has been taking the petition around her

neighborhood. It has been easy to get people to sign, she said.

"The situation has gotten worse within the last five years, over the past three years, it's gotten impossible," she said.

Richard Myers, chairman of the Wainwright Citizens Advisory Committee, who lives on Ardley Road, just south of the airport, one block north of Montauk Highway, said the helicopters bother him, too, but, unlike Mr. Dalene, he doesn't want them to be banned from the airport.

"Anyone who is near the airport is affected by the noise. Part of the problem is they let the pilots start their engines and then they sit for several minutes waiting to take off. That generates a lot of noise. But nobody wants to prohibit the helicopters from using the airport," he said.

The helicopter noise complaints, which are heaviest in the summer, are hardly new. Residents have been complaining, as Ms. Zerilli said, for the past three to five years, when chartering a helicopter from New York City to East Hampton became very popular, even though at about \$3,000 one way, it's an expensive ride. Residents who live near the airport have been complaining about airplane noise in general for years.

Traffic at the airport dropped off in 2009, due to the poor economy, and is now back on track at the peak levels of 2007, according to East Hampton Airport Manager Jim Bundrige.

"We work on noise abatement all the time," he said. "As far as the helicopters, we've made it better by changing a route that used to come from the south and into the airport. We moved around a route so that it doesn't affect hundreds of people, just tens of people."

One of those people is Mr. Dalene, who uses his camera and a handheld decibel meter to measure the noise. In the last two years, he has recorded helicopter noise as high as 90 decibels. The town's



Frank Dalene

KYRIL BROMLEY PHOTOS

noise ordinance limit in general is 65 decibels during the day and 55 decibels between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. But the ordinance excludes aircraft, he said.

The FAA has studied the problem of helicopter noise with state and local officials on Long Island and come up with a proposal to require helicopters to steer clear of Long Island's North Shore.

"The FAA's proposal to require helicopter operators to use the North Shore Long Island route generated nearly 1,000 comments. Because the agency has to review and address each comment before issuing a final rule, the FAA will not be able to issue a final rule before the end of this summer," said Arlene Salac, a spokeswoman for the FAA.

But Mr. Bundrige said that won't help the East End "one iota" because once the copters come to Riverhead, they begin their descent into the Hamptons.

U.S. Representative Tim Bishop, a Democrat from Southampton, agrees.

"I'd like to see this FAA rule route the

helicopters out over water the longest possible time," he said. "I'd like to route them around Orient Point and keep them over Peconic Bay. And we want helicopters to maintain an altitude of 2,500 to 3,000 feet for the longest possible time. I also want there to be a southern route that approaches East Hampton and Westhampton."

Town Councilman Dominick Stanzi-one, who is the liaison between the Town Board and the airport, brushed aside Mr. Dalene's suggestion that the airport be closed to commercial traffic. He said the town is on the case and referred to its own comments to the FAA on the proposed New York North Shore Route.

"The Town of East Hampton believes that the NYNSR is the first step in addressing, in a comprehensive and thoughtful manner, the problem of helicopter overflights and noise throughout the East End of Long Island," the comments begin. Also in the summary of comments, the town says that it wants the FAA to go further and begin a "formal stakeholder process" that would "ensure that the town, other airport proprietors, and affected communities have a seat at the table in directing a comprehensive study of helicopter noise in the East End of Long Island."

"All reasonable efforts have been made to accommodate the concerns of our citizens," Mr. Stanzi-one said.

Jeffery Smith, the chairman of the Eastern Region Helicopter Council, which represents pilots in the Northeast, did not return phone calls from the East Hampton Press by this edition's deadline on Tuesday.

But he told the Wall Street Journal, which published an article about helicopter noise in the Hamptons in its weekend issue that helicopter companies are "already working to reduce noise and to stay at an altitude of 2,500 feet wherever they can."

Richard MacDonald, an artist and playwright, doesn't know Mr. Dalene but can attest to the helicopter noise he hears and the low flights he sees from his home on Deep View Court. "I swear I can see the whites of the pilots' eyes," he said, as the helicopters swoop down over his house. "It's only a matter of time before there's a crash. It'll happen on a Friday or a Monday when the traffic is busiest. On Mondays, they all blast off at 6:30 in the morning."



Frank Dalene believes eliminating commercial traffic from East Hampton Airport will put an end to helicopter noise complaints.