

## GO FLY A KITE? NO PROBLEM

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Standing in a field at Maumee Bay State Park, Carl Anderson was ready for a fight.

His small, super-lightweight fighter kite darted up and down in the light breeze, spinning and zigging and zagging through the sky with incredible precision. Too bad there were no other fighter kites in the sky.

Undeterred, the 65-year-old from Ottawa County decided to improvise. A moment later there was a yelp of surprise from a young girl sitting at the edge of a nearby parking lot.

"Ha! Ha!" Mr. Anderson laughed impishly. "Bopped her right on the head!"



Kevin Kilgoar flies his kite at Maumee Bay State park. (THE BLADE/DAVE ZAPOTOSKY)

Most of the kite fliers who gather here near the windy shores of Lake Erie aren't kids anymore, but that doesn't mean they have to act accordingly.

"Maybe it's our midlife crisis," said Kevin Kilgoar, 52, commandant de facto of the Black Swamp Air Force, a club of kite enthusiasts that meets at the state park from 1 to 3 p.m. every first Saturday and third Sunday of the month.

Mr. Kilgoar, of Perrysburg Township, said there are about 40 members, most of them over the age of 40. A hardy few enjoy the pastime year-round, reveling in each other's company as much as the thrill of keeping a kite aloft.

"It's mostly a social activity," said fellow member Terry Gerweck, 56, of Monroe, who has built kites off and on all his life.

### PHOTO GALLERY

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Even so, Mr. Gerweck recognizes the joy and peace of flying a kite all alone, which he likes to do sometimes at Sterling State Park in southeast Michigan.

"There's something fundamental and magical about [kites], I guess," he said. "I put it up and I sit there and I'm staring at the sky and the lake and the trees — all by myself — and it's peaceful and it's quiet. ... It's part of what you should be: natural."

Not satisfied with simply flying kites, Mr. Gerweck also has been known to harness their power to pull him around in a three-wheeled buggy. He's tried it on a boat, too.

Even in a light breeze, Scott Haas, 58, of Monclova Township, was able to get his kite-powered buggy going in a parking lot at Maumee Bay State Park on a recent afternoon.

"My personal speed record is 35 mph," he said, though he knows of someone who's gone more than twice as fast.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that people approaching middle age and beyond are getting in on the fun that many associate with kids. Mel Hickman, executive director of the American Kitefliers Association, estimates that 80 percent of the group's 3,700 members are 25 or older.

"Part of it's nostalgia, part of it's a simple activity where you can put in as little or as much money as you want,"

the Washington man said.

Despite being simple, ancient playthings — kites have been around for thousands of years and are the oldest form of aircraft — they've managed to keep up with the times, incorporating changes in technology to become stronger, lighter, and easier to use.

"When I was a kid, you'd go out and buy a 10-cent kite, which was made out of some balsa and paper, or I made it myself. Today there are good materials that these kites are made out of and they'll last for years ...," said Fred Bretzloff, president of Yankee Doodle Flag Co. in Sylvania Township, a local kite seller.

"Today's kites are to the point where you can basically lay the ball of string down on the ground and the kite will fly itself," he said.

Unless, of course, there's no wind. It's a rarity where they meet at Maumee Bay, due a perfect mix of northwest Ohio's flatlands and winds that come whipping off the lake, but it can happen.

When that happens and the sound of rustling kites in the air is replaced with the thuds of them crashing into the ground, club members have a pretty good back-up plan.

"Usually [we] just sit around and b.s.," Mr. Kilgoar said. "We eat quite a bit, too. We have a lot of good cooks in the club."

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