



CHICKEN WINGS

A comic strip takes off.

If you have any involvement with the aviation community you've doubtless heard of the "Chicken Wings" comic strip—if you haven't, you might be missing out.

"Chicken Wings" is an aviation themed comic strip that takes place on a small hangar filled with many colorful characters.

"I think it was born on a napkin one late night at the beginning of November 2001," co-creator Mike Strasser says. "In 2004 we had a few strips. At first they were little people, then we came up with the name "Chicken Wings" so we turned them into chickens."

Created by brothers Mike and Stefan Strasser, "Chicken Wings" started out as a playful idea, but they soon gained a noticeable following and before they knew it, "Chicken Wings" took off.

In the comic's early days Mike was working at a flight school as a mechanic, backup charter pilot and flight instructor. He was also enrolled in flight school getting his helicopter ratings. His younger brother Stefan, who draws the cartoon, was going to university in Tokyo. They'd come out with a few strips each month and Mike would hand them around the school. Eventually people began asking for more so they started making pamphlets and created chickenwingscomics.com.

The brothers grew up in Austria and Mike was stationed in Cyprus for two years in the United Nations to complete his mandatory military service. It was during this time he decided to get

his pilot ratings in the United States. Mike has been interested in flying since he was 8 when he attended a local airshow and was mesmerized by the acrobatic performance of an AV-8 Harrier.

"I started building model planes and flying RC planes and I figured out I couldn't be a Harrier pilot because the Austrian military doesn't have any, so I changed my mind in my teen years after seeing 'Air America'." This is what inspired him to become a helicopter pilot and now he's fighting fires for Guardian Helicopters Inc., based in Van Nuys, California.

Stefan is two years younger and lives in Vienna, Austria. He's mainly a cartoonist and Chicken Wings is his primary project. He also writes and draws a comic for a fire-fighting magazine called Flo and Co, and does graphic and web design on the side.

"Up to the point when I decided to try and do this full time, which was quite late in life, I didn't consider being a cartoonist a real career option," Stefan says, who had been working on "Chicken Wings" for three years before graduating university. "It dawned on me that I would be happier doing this than wearing a suit and tie ... so at the point where it was 'get a job or else,' I opted for 'or else' and gave it a try."

Recently, "Chicken Wings" upgraded their website with new features and more space. It also has the archives from the past two years, so it's fun to start from the beginning and see the strip move forward and the characters interact with each other. One of the most entertaining interactions is between the pilot Chuck who flies a Cessna 172, and its mechanic Julio. They always seem to be butting heads over something.

The site also features a new discussion forum that's been getting a lot of traffic since it opened. "We don't have as much traffic as the AOPA, but we've got a bunch of really good people in there with a lot of experience in aviation," says Mike.

When it first began, "Chicken Wings" was pretty technical and most of the jokes were directly related to aviation, but now it's morphed into a comic strip for aviation enthusiasts and laypeople alike. Mike and

Stefan cite comic strips like "Peanuts," "Calvin and Hobbes" and "Garfield" for inspiration and some of that bleeds through in their humor.

"We've caught a bit of flack from the hardcore aviation fans who've been following us from day one who ask us why we have to insert an office joke," Mike says. "But we also try to be accurate enough to attract people to aviation and show them it's a good, fun business to be in."

It's one of Mike and Stefan's biggest dreams to eventually see an animated Chicken Wings TV series but for now they're content with the amount of notoriety they've gotten thus far, and the brothers are hoping the sky is the limit. +

For more information, visit www.chickenwingscomics.com.

