



DEL SOL QUARTET
The Del Sol String Quartet will perform at The Foundry Oct. 18 — **B2**



CHOREOGRAPHY
Berkshire Pulse choreographers prepare to travel to a summit in Texas — **B3**



DINING OUT
Expanded guide about where to dine out in the area — **B5**



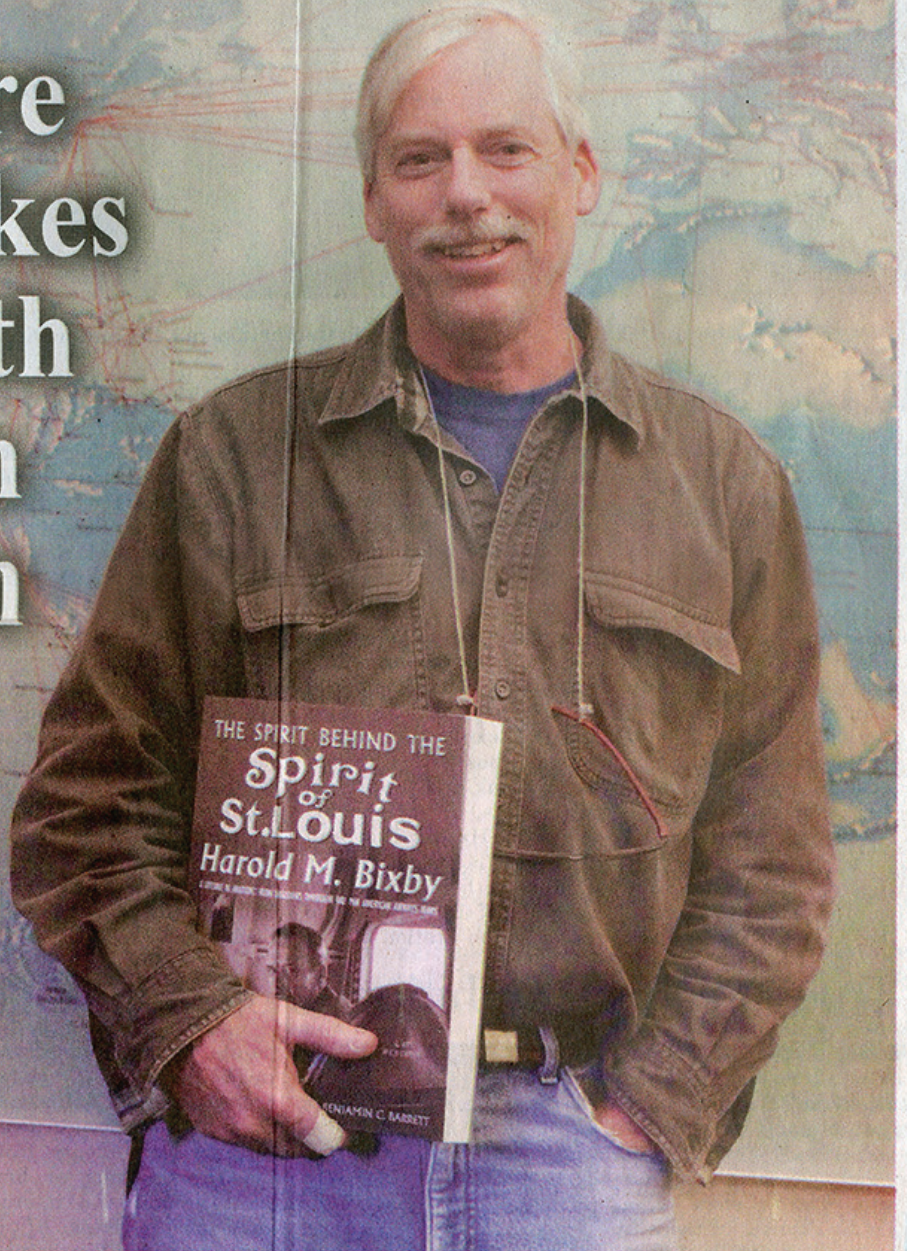
CALENDAR
Music, theater and more events. Page B4

THIS WEEK

Section **B**

BERKSHIRE RECORD • OCTOBER 18-24, 2019

Berkshire author takes flight with book on aviation



Evan Triantafyllidis

Benjamin Barrett, a Great Barrington native, holds his new book, "The Spirit Behind The Spirit Of St. Louis," in which he explores the beginnings of aviation history with the preservation of photos and flight logs of his grandfather, Harold M. Bixby.

By Evan Triantafyllidis

Much like the early pioneers of aviation, the sky's the limit for lifelong Great Barrington native and author Benjamin Barrett.

In his new book titled, "The Spirit Behind The Spirit of St. Louis," Barrett details his grandfather's involvement during the literal take off of aviation, including his role in backing the first solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927.

The 465-page book features the preservation of more than 600 historical documents, rare photographs and the flight logs of his

grandfather, Harold M. Bixby. Barrett's grandfather was a St. Louis businessman and at the age of 25, he backed an aviator by the name of Charles Lindbergh's for the first ever solo trans-Atlantic flight. He would later serve as the manager of Chinese National Airways in Shanghai during the 1930's. Bixby flew across the Atlantic twice with Lindbergh before his death in 1965.

Barrett's research, he says, involved extensive reading, writing and interviewing of family members. The collection of documents compiled serve as a testament to his grandfather, but also serves as an important source of information about the infancy of aviation.

"It could have been two volumes, but we trimmed it down and shrunk things down and got it to where it is," said Barrett. "The images are so important to me that they justify having an index to themselves, separate from the text."

Barrett was only 4 years old when Bixby died, but as the "self-appointed family historian," and also the 16th of 17 grandchildren of Bixby, Barrett's goal was to preserve his family's history in writing.

Growing up in the Berkshires, Barrett was naturally drawn to flight in his youth, with the Great Barrington Airport serving as a nearby

Continued on B2

Berkshire author takes flight with book

Continued from B1

launch point for his interest. On a drive home from school, when he was 16 years old, Barrett told his mother that he wanted to learn how to fly airplanes.

It was then, Barrett recalls, when his mother, Catherine Whittemore Bixby, slammed on the brakes and immediately brought him by the scruff of his neck to the Great Barrington Airport, much to his surprise.

Barrett was unaware at the time of the depth of his family's history, specifically his grand-

father's role in the forefront of the aviation industry, but was promptly brought to the local airport and instructed to take flight lessons.

"My knees were shaking and off I went," said Barrett. "It was sure fun, and now looking back, I understand why my mom stopped the car so abruptly, because her father spent his whole life in the aviation world."

Bixby was most well-known for being a primary backer of Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic. Bixby is also credited with naming the plane, "The Spirit of St. Louis."

Barrett, who is also the owner of the Berkshire Veneer Company in Egremont, writes in detail about his grandfather's 1933 trip to China as a representative of Pan American Airways. The author credits Bixby for helping to establish passenger and airmail routes in China.

"For him to be able to negotiate those deals with the Chinese as an American is pretty remarkable," said Barrett.

The book, published by The Troy Book Makers, is available at TheSpiritBehindTheSpiritOfStLouis.com