

} ?>

Record-Journal



[increase font size]



[decrease font size]



[print this article]

NEWS

July 16, 2008

Local flight museum loses lease, forced to move

Museum owner to hold last open house Saturday

by Jon Sayer

for the Record-Journal

With the way Kate Simmons talks about Bellingham's Heritage Flight Museum's old airplanes, you would think the old war birds were veterans too -- in addition to the airmen who flew them.

"You can strap everything, plus the kitchen sink, to this aircraft," said Simmons, the museum's director of programs and administration, of their Douglas A-1 Skyraider. "This aircraft can carry the same bomb load as a B-17, and it can do it with one engine."

The B-17 was a large, four-engined bomber from World War II. It could carry four tons of bombs.

Standing next to the Skyraider, an attack aircraft of the 1950s to early 1970s that served during the Korean and Vietnam wars, Simmons stretched her arms out along part of its left wing, describing how planes like this one could lose entire sections of their wings or tails in battle -- holes big enough to fit a person -- and still bring their pilots home safely.

But this old war bird is in trouble, along with the museum's 12 other vintage aircraft.

The Heritage Flight Museum received a 30-day notice last week to vacate its hanger at Bellingham International Airport, giving the local specialty historical organization until Aug. 8 to vacate.

The hanger was sold to a new owner, who wants to use the building to house a private jet.

"This time in 30-days, this museum won't be here. We don't know where it will be," said Simmons.

The museum hosts an open house once a month, and the last of these events in their current hanger will take place this Saturday. The open house starts at noon and ends at 4 p.m.

The flight museum's story begins in 1996, when Apollo 8 astronaut Bill Anders, the man who photographed the famous "Earthrise" photo of Earth emerging from behind the moon in 1968, founded it.

His goal with the museum was to honor the history and veterans of the country by preserving old war planes, beyond just displaying them, but by flying them as well. Bill's museum is one of only a few aviation museums in the country that actually flies its aircraft, Simmons said.

And there's a reason why -- it's expensive to fly historic planes.

First, the planes need to be in flying condition, with operational engines, controls and instruments. They require expensive fuel, and these old birds aren't exactly fuel-efficient. Simmons said the Skyraider uses 50 to 60 gallons of fuel just to do a simple one-hour flyover. Throw in insurance costs, and a single flight can cost upwards of \$1,500.

Bill initiated his project in the form of a traveling museum, flying the planes from air show to air show. Then in 2001, the Port of Bellingham invited the museum to stay at the airport.

The museum moved into what they thought would be a temporary facility on the outskirts of the airport in 2002. Although Simmons said it's considered a large hanger, it can only accommodate about half of the museum's collection.




Simmons said the Port promised to find a plot of land for them to build a permanent facility, capable of holding more planes.

The Port had trouble providing the land for a permanent facility. What was supposed to be a temporary accommodation ended up

Story published July 16, 2008

Story uploaded 07.16.08 - 5:56 am

Record-Journal

 [increase font size]  [decrease font size]  [print this article]

NEWS

July 16, 2008

Local flight museum loses lease, forced to move

Museum owner to hold last open house Saturday

by Jon Sayer

for the Record-Journal

serving as their home for the last six years.

The museum's roots are fully developed in Whatcom County. In the last few months alone, their planes have flown over Memorial Day functions at Moles Family Funeral Homes & Crematory's Greenacre's Memorial Park in Ferndale, as well as the Scottish Highland Games at Hovander Park in June.

In addition, the association has flown its vintage planes over the funerals of Whatcom County veterans as well as at air shows across the country.

The Port's Aviation director Art Choat said they can't expand the airport without encroaching on wetlands.

"Right now, we've built on every available square foot of land that we can build on," Choat said.

In order to fill in the adjacent wetlands to expand the airport -- and provide land for a permanent museum -- environmental regulations require the Port to go through a staggering number of bureaucratic applications -- all of which take time.

Greg Anders, the museum's executive director, said the turn of events wasn't entirely unexpected. They've been renting out their hanger one month at a time for years, expecting the permanent facility to be just over the horizon. The specter of losing their temporary facility, therefore, always loomed.

Greg said he doesn't know if the museum can stay in the county, but his primary responsibility is to keep the organization alive, whether here or elsewhere.

"We were hoping to bring a great cultural asset to Whatcom County," Greg said. "We put a lot of money and effort into doing that, and because of the obstacles the Port ran into, we may have missed our opportunity to make this our home."

He said they will still be able to operate without the large facility, but at a reduced capacity. They have several small hangers where they keep the other half of their collection.

Simmons said they might be able to move into another hanger at the airport, but if they do, it will come at a premium. Hanger space is expensive, and a higher bidder could leave them without a home.

"We're always at the whim of somebody with more money and a bigger airplane," Simmons said.

Admission for the open house is by donation, suggested at \$5 per attendee.

Story published July 16, 2008

Story uploaded 07.16.08 - 5:56 am

All contents copyright ©2007 Lewis Publishing Company, Inc. All rights reserved.

Ferndale Record-Journal . 2004 Main Street, Ferndale, WA 98248

P.O. Box 38 . Phone: (360)384-1411 . Fax: (360)384-1417

Site created, developed and maintained by Matthew Anderson.