

FIREBAUGH HALL OF FAME NOMINEE



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Max Firebaugh, left, huddles with Airport Manager Chris Collins and the late R.D. White following completion of the new hangar at the Mt. Vernon Airport. Firebaugh, who died in late 2011, will be inducted into the Illinois Aviation Hall of Fame on May 16 in Moline.

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MT. VERNON — A former manager of the Mt. Vernon Airport will be honored posthumously next month when he becomes a member of Illinois Aviation Hall of Fame.

Max Firebaugh, who served as the airport manager for 22 years, will be inducted during the organization's banquet to be held May 16 at the

i-Wireless Center in Moline. The Illinois Aviation Conference will be held at the motel for three days, beginning on May 14.

Airport Manager Chris Collins nominated Firebaugh for the award in 2007, and after failing to get him in the Hall that year, Collins resubmitted the nomination last fall — following Firebaugh's death on Dec. 31, 2011.

“Last fall I talked to Dr. Charlie Rodriguez, who is retired from SIU-C as the chair of the aviation maintenance technology program and he said it would be great for Southern Illinois for Max to be in the Hall because it is dominated by aviators from the northern part of the state,” Collins said. “We’re all

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Firebaugh a Hall of Fame nominee

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really excited here at the airport for getting Max in the Hall of Fame.”

Collins said that Firebaugh was a pioneer in aviation. Before becoming the chief pilot for Collins Brothers Oil, Firebaugh was a pilot in the military for the Army Air Corps.

“He was a member of the greatest generation, World War II,” Collins said. “He was heavily involved in aviation before he finished college. After finishing college he came back to Mt. Vernon and worked for Collins Brothers as a geologist, and then became manager of the airport. Not only was he the manager, he was everything, he was the Mt. Vernon Airport,” Collins said, noting that Firebaugh was instrumental in bringing charter service and the fixed base operations to the King City, selling fuel, supervising aircraft maintenance and getting flight instruction in service.

“He was instrumental in where

we are today with the airport infrastructure,” Collins continued. “He was the manager when we were just a small airport with prop engines up to the jet engines. He oversaw all the expansion to accept the Ozark DC 9’s. He took the airport from a small service to the jet age service, giving us a large capacity apron, the new terminal, a 6500 feet runway with an instrument landing system with precision approach.”

Firebaugh volunteered his time with the Civil Air Patrol and organized ground schools for prospective pilots. He was a member of EAA Chapter 1155 and assisted with over 1,900 Young Eagle rides, information states.

He was a member of the Purple Heart Organization, having earned the Purple Heart and Air Medal with 13 oak clusters for the European and African theater. He also flew three missions during D-Day in Normandy. Firebaugh flew 69 B-26 combat missions over Europe during World War II.

Firebaugh is believed to be the first person affiliated with the Mt. Vernon Airport to be inducted into the Illinois Aviation Hall of Fame.