

WWII bomber coming to Outland Airport

Airport looking for sponsors to help cover cost of visit

BY TIM JOHNSON
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MT. VERNON — Visitors to Mt. Vernon Outland Airport will be able to take tours and rides in one of the most storied planes of World War II when the Commemorative Air Force Arizona Wing brings a fully restored Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress to the airport June 10, where it will remain until June 14.

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Sentinel Photo

UP AND AWAY — Crowds gather to look at the Boeing B-17 bomber "Sentimental Journey," and maybe take a ride, during its last visit to Mt. Vernon Outland Airport in 2008.

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Airport Director Chris Collins said the exhibit offers a rare opportunity to get a feel for what it was like to be a part of a bomber crew.

"[Visitors] are able to experience sort of what it was like to be an 18-year-old gunner or radio operator, or flight engineer," Collins said. "It's amazing when you're inside there how loud it is. You're riding in thin aluminum, basically. There's nothing like it."

Collins said he is looking for sponsors to help cover the cost of bringing the plane, named "Sentimental Journey," to the King City.

Lodging and transportation for the plane's crew are already covered, but the airport could still use help covering the plane's fuel costs, which add up to about \$3,000 per hour.

Collins said the plane guzzles more than 100 gallons an hour per engine, of which it has four. The airport will pay the plane's fuel cost to its next stop on its tour, which will run about \$4,000.

Collins said sponsorships of any amount are welcome, but businesses that donate \$500 or more will be included on the event flyer and will receive a boarding pass for a ride on the B-17.

Rides will be available to anyone willing to pay the \$425 ticket price. Collins estimated the rides will last about 45 minutes from start-up and takeoff to landing and exit.

This will be the group's third visit to the airport, having made a stop most

recently in 2008. Collins spoke with pride on Outland Airport being chosen as a destination on the CAF's 60-city tour.

"It says a lot for our community," Collins said. "One of the biggest things is being able to park the bomber right outside a passenger terminal that actually has a restaurant and is a community showcase. They just loved that when they were here before. They said they'd never been treated nicer nor had better convenience than at our stop."

The weekend of the B-17 visit will be a busy one for the airport. On June 12 it will host the Celebrate Life Festival, an event featuring activities, music and crafts lasting from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

A dedication ceremony will be held 2 p.m. June 13 at the Koziara Terminal aircraft ramp for the Jefferson County Hall of Honor. The hall is a permanent display of individual tributes to Jefferson County World War II veterans living and deceased, featuring framed displays of photographs of the veterans with military records and awards received.

"We call it the Jefferson County Hall of Honor, but we're not going to refuse anybody," Collins said. "Right now we have 87 guys and three girls up on the wall."

Nancy Schutte will sing the Star-Spangled Banner at the ceremony, followed by the main address by County Board Chairman and retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Colonel Ted Buck. The ceremony will finish with a rifle salute and the playing of Taps by the American Legion Post 141 Honor Guard.

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