

Air Race Classic to return to Mount Vernon

The last time Mount Vernon was a stop was 1990

BY JOSH JONES

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MOUNT VERNON — A national tradition spanning over 45 years will stop by Mount Vernon for the third time ever this week.

The 45th Annual Air Race Classic (ARC) is being held from June 21-24, as pilots will travel from Lakeland, Florida, to Terre Haute, Indiana. According to the event's website, the Air Race Classic is the epicenter of women's air racing.

Pilots range in age from 17 to 90 years old. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds including students, teachers, doctors, airline pilots, business owners, professionals and

air traffic controllers. Race Teams, consisting of at least two women pilots, must fly visual flight rules during daylight hours only and are given four days to make flybys at each en route timing point and then land at the terminus. The race route changes each year, approximately 2,400 statute miles in length with eight or nine timing points. This year, 51 teams, consisting of 115 women pilots from across the United States and around the world, will take off at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, June 21.

Mount Vernon Outland Airport Director Chris Collins said that the pilots will fly by Mount Vernon most likely Wednesday afternoon and all day on Thursday. He said some pilots will decide to do the required flyby and move on and some will choose to land and spend the night in Mount Vernon.

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"We don't know how many will be staying, how many will just do the flyby and move on, how many will be taking on fuel. We have a sneaking suspicion that all of them will be stopping for fuel just based on the legs between the previous stop and the stop after this one," Collins said. "We have anywhere from Wednesday until Friday around noon is when they will be coming through. We happen to believe our busiest day is going to be Thursday."

The planned route includes stops in Moultrie, Georgia; Muscle Shoals, Alabama; Hattiesburg, Missouri; Pine Bluff, Arizona; Ada, Oklahoma; Lawrence, Kansas; Mount Vernon; Tullahoma, Tennessee; and the terminus in Terre Haute, Indiana. Collins said that this marks the third time the Air Race Classic has had Mount Vernon as a stop.

"The first time was in 1969, second time 1990, so this isn't something that comes up every five to 10

years," Collins said. "It took several years to get back on the list, because every airport in the country is competing for these spots. They only have eight stops a year, spread across 5,000-plus airports."

For the Mount Vernon stop, Sheila Jolly-Scrivner is the official stop chair and Don Lewis is the official timer.

"Both have done a tremendous job preparing and leading the local team," Collins said. "The stop would not be possible without the volunteerism."

The Air Race Classic traces its roots back to the 1929 Women's Air Derby, aka the Powder Puff Derby, in which Amelia Earhart and 19 other daring female pilots raced from Santa Monica, California, to Cleveland, Ohio. This year's race celebrates the 93rd anniversary of that historic competition.

"Every June, female pilots from across the nation fly the ARC for the compe-



Chris Collins

tion and camaraderie," said Air Race Classic President Lara Gaerte. "We look forward to celebrating the 93rd anniversary of the Women's Air Derby as we welcome back veteran racers and meet new competitors at our start in Lakeland, Florida."

Collins said that the public is welcome to visit the airport and watch the planes fly by/stop at the airport. He said that the airport is seeking volunteers to be ambassadors to the Mount Vernon and Jefferson County community.

"We certainly want and encourage the public to come to the airport, meet the racers, see the planes," Collins said. "Again it is your chance to be an ambassador. If you are interested please come, there will be interesting people to talk to and meet and of course the airport is an interesting place with the Hall of Honor Museum and the other things that go on day to day here."

For more information on the Mount Vernon stop or to volunteer, people may call (618) 242-7016. People may also follow the racers' progress at airraceclassic.org.

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AIR RACE CLASSIC — This year the Air Race Classic is June 21-24 with Mount Vernon as one of the stops. The last time the event was held in Mount Vernon was 1990. Pictured are the 2019 Air Race Classic racers.