

# Serving more than aviation

BY BOB FRAKES  
IT CAUGHT MY EYE

It was "Eyes to the Sky" October 27th as my wife and I made our way to the Mt. Vernon Airport for the ARMY Golden Knight Parachute display. Just watching the "Twin Engine Otter" load up and take off was fun.

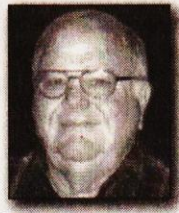
It got off the runway in no time and climbed up to about 13,000 feet in no time. The plane was hardly visible when the chutes started popping and down they came. Some were solo and others had people along "for the ride" in tandem. The solo chuters in particular came down very steep and "flared out" with a whoosh before just landing on their feet. Several of the tandem chuters were pretty wide awake when they were done! Things really moved as the plane landed about the same time as the chuters and reloaded.

We enjoyed it so much we went in and had lunch at the Airport/Bonnie café and walked out to watch more. We had been joined by Steve Lacey and his daughter Melissa Elliott and Gary Price and his brother Doug.

I also talked with Airport Manager Chris Collins. I knew that the airport had been involved in many activities, as we had been out there lots. I asked him if he would mind summarizing some of the goings on. Photo, by the way, is by Marty Cox.

CHRIS RESPONDED — The recent visit by to Mt. Vernon Outland Airport by the United States ARMY Golden Knights Tandem Parachute Team completed an incredibly busy year of events. All events brought visitors to the King City but also provided opportunities for residents to see different sights. Much coverage has always been provided to the airport by various media outlets regarding aviation operations, capital development projects and finance, but little has been mentioned about the service and outreach efforts occurring annually at the airport.

The Mt. Vernon Airport Authority Board of Commissioners consists of five community and business minded leaders. Three have served multiple terms with similar tenure as the airport manager. That era ushered in a new slogan — "We are going to find ways to say YES." And that is exactly how the Golden



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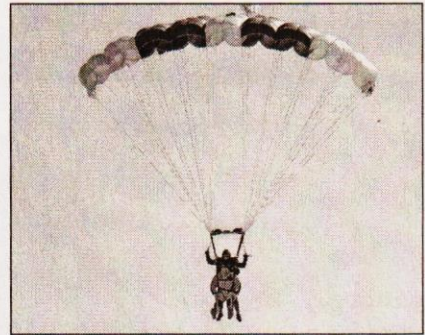
Knights came to Mt. Vernon. A visitor, identifying himself as a service member from Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, came looking in early September for a place to conduct a special exercise. The airport manager said "Yes" before even hearing about the mission. And so goes why so many things happen at our airport.

2022 saw the Run For the Wall, Air Race Classic (National Women's Air Race), 35th Annual Salute to Freedom, EAA Young Eagles Rally, 14th Annual Midwest LSA Expo, Bonnie Café Planes, Trains, and Automobiles (and second Young Eagles Rally), Meridian M-Class Owners, Pilots Association Safety Meet and the Golden Knights exercise.

Occurring each weekend in the spring and fall are the Mt. Vernon Soccer Club games scattered across five fields in the spacious grounds. At least two cross country meets are held each year at the airport lake. A mixing of the soccer club fans, cross country supporters and Bonnie Café regulars often leads to filled parking spaces. This is music to the ears of the airport board and management as they strive to see the facility being used and enjoyed by all.

Perhaps the most visible feature is the Jefferson County Hall of Honor and Colonel R.D. White Veterans Museum. What started as a way to honor veterans at an aviation event occurring each October transformed into a unique display of over 800 individual "Tributes." Each Tribute captures the veteran in their youth telling a story of their service through photos, military insignias and commendations. The Hall of Honor is virtual, at [www.veteranshallof Honor.com](http://www.veteranshallof Honor.com), allowing loved ones and interested parties to view from afar. Donations from appreciative families fill display cases and the small museum in the former baggage claim. Some items on display are truly unique.

Many activities at the airport go



unseen. Regular meetings of VFW Post #9233, ARCOM (Ham Radio) Club, Gideons, Jefferson County Crime Stoppers, AMVET Ladies, Colonial Dames and various Girl Scout/Brownie Troops occur. Two separate bus charters initiate and return to the airport multiple times per year. Political rallies/campaign stops occur ahead of each election. With Bonnie Café's ability to serve large numbers of people, class reunions, funerals, weddings, birthdays, retirements, baby showers and all manner of gatherings occur weekly at the airport.

Tours of the airport facilities are always available, led by enthusiastic guides.

The airport is also proud that it has helped many organizations expand (beyond the airport's capabilities). Several Jefferson County Home Shows were held in its various hangars. The YMCA Karate program called the airport "home" for nearly five years. The Jefferson County 4H held its General Project Show in the Koziara Terminal for three years. Many churches were launched at the airport prior to finding permanent homes.

So what lies ahead for 2023? The annual events mentioned above will certainly return. But, the magic occurs via a chance encounter, referral or simply a telephone call. When the opportunity arises, you can bet the answer will be "Yes." Tourism, hospitality and retail will most likely benefit. And the community may see something out of the ordinary!

Questions or comments?

P.S. THE ELECTION IS OVER. THOSE WHO RAN, REMEMBER WHEN IT COMES TO ALL THOSE SIGNS, WHAT GOES UP NEEDS TO COME DOWN!

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