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EDITOR'S PICK

Biz Beat — Help foundation's plans take off

By Chesley Oxendine coxendine@muskogeephoenix.com Oct 6, 2019



There stands at the Muskogee-Davis Regional Airport a World War II-era hangar, built mostly of wood. You don't really feel the sense of awe looking at it from the inside, nor even when you step inside the half-destroyed wing-offices — it's not until you're standing in the immense hangar itself that you really get a sense of what you're experiencing.

You see massive wood beams across the ceiling that were lifted up there by hand, fixed with bolts as big as your fist. You stand amid artwork that's been there for 70 years or more, depicting the airmen who visited the hangar. You really get a sense of the immense history of Muskogee-Davis Regional in a way that feels uniquely real.

It's one of three such hangars in the United States, I'm told, and now there are plans in place to save it and turn it into a living museum through the Military and Indian Aviation Heritage Foundation.

Such a museum would be capable of communicating the feelings I just described to everyone, not just the lucky folks who occasionally get to go inside. I'm not only here to make the case for the history, though. I think such a plan would be good for the business community in Muskogee.

The Foundation recently unveiled a \$2.5 million plan to renovate and repair the hangar. Asbestos has to be stripped out of the building, the ailing wing-offices need to be reconstructed, and steps need to be taken to keep Mother Nature's ever-encroaching grasp off of the building. From there, the Foundation aims to create a place where visitors can learn about the planes hands-on, rather than simply reading about them or looking at them.

"It's fun to walk into a museum, but there's tape around it, so you can't touch the airplane or get into the airplane or see the airplane fly, but you bet it's cool," said foundation director and pilot Ann Shepherd. "It's not any fun if you can't touch, feel and understand what it's about."

The attraction of such a facility to tourists from all around should be obvious. From there, the benefits to local businesses should also become clear, in the same way that the War Memorial Park and the Roxy Theater are beneficial: people take their first steps into Muskogee thanks to these places, many of them historical, and then spread out into the wider community, shopping here, eating here, and maybe eventually moving here, who knows?

After all, there's plenty of good here — just ask Shepherd.

"I'm a pilot, I fly over Muskogee. I fly into Muskogee, I house a plane at Muskogee Davis," Shepherd said. "The city offers so much. To outside people, what Muskogee can offer is just huge."

This isn't just an opportunity for the town to add yet another way to experience its rich history; it's a chance to improve an already impressive portfolio of museums and attractions in a way that will continue our tradition of unique and interesting places to go, and thereby improve our community with it.

If you're interested in finding out more about the Foundation, visit <http://mia-foundation.com>. (You can find a donate button there, too — maybe throw in a little toward the renovation costs ahead of the Spring fundraising the Foundation plans to kick off next year.)



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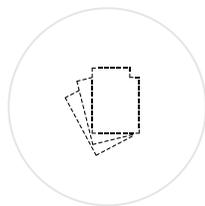


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