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FEATURED

Foundation aims to renovate World War II hangar

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This wooden hangar was constructed during World War II — one of three such buildings still standing in the United States.
[Submitted photo](#)

A hangar just on the outside edge of Muskogee Davis Regional Airport is one of three such hangars still standing in the country — a wood-built, World War II-era building.

Just inside, the years of damage include collapsed flooring, holes in the walls, debris scattered across the floors of wing-offices long forgotten. Beyond those offices, however, the hangar stands in remarkably good shape, a cavernous hall framed by massive wood beams and artwork emblazoned along the bare wooden walls: the names of pilots based in the hangar, drawings of flags and planes.

"I get chills when I stand here and think about how this place was built," said pilot Ann Shepherd, standing beside one of the many planes filling the hangar. "They lifted those huge beams up there by hand."

It's a sense of wonder Shepherd and the organization she represents — the Military and Indian Aviation Heritage Foundation — wants to share with others by eventually converting the World War II hangar into a living museum. The proposed museum would host planes from across American military history, Shepherd said, and allow visitors to interact with them.

The first step toward that goal is renovating the hangar, which will run a total of \$2.5 million, Shepherd said. The renovations involve reconstruction of the wing-offices and rooms, the removal of asbestos, and other improvements.

"It's going to be a lot of work, but it will be worth it not only for the airport, but for Muskogee," she said.

The newly launched Military And Indian Aviation Heritage Foundation just recently received 501(3)(c) classification as a nonprofit, and from there the group plans to kick off major fundraising for the renovation in the spring, Shepherd said.

"This has been about eight months in the working, and we've done a lot of the foundational work, meeting with the city and meeting with the architect," Shepherd said. "Now that we've gotten our 501(c)(3) status, we're ready to go to work, and that is raising money."

The renovation will serve as the starting point for plans to build a living museum, Shepherd said, which will in turn provide visitors with opportunities to experience and interact with historic planes, rather than just read about or see them. That will include tours and, yes, flights of the airplanes in question, she added.

"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," Shepherd said. "It's not any fun if you can't touch, feel and understand what it's about."

Shepherd said she especially hopes the museum can renew kids' interest in aviation.

"Kids don't want to be astronauts and go to the moon anymore. When I was a kid all I wanted to do was fly," Shepherd said. "I want them to love to fly because they can, because they can do anything they set out to do."

That's to say nothing of what the attraction would do for Muskogee, which is already full to the brim with historical centers such as the War Memorial Park and Three Rivers Museum, Shepherd said.

"I'm a pilot, I fly over Muskogee. I fly into Muskogee, I house a plane at Muskogee Davis. When you live here, you really take for granted all the things you have. I fly into a lot of airports in a lot of places, and I am telling you Muskogee Davis is one of the prettiest and nicest I've ever landed in," Shepherd said. "The city offers so much. To outside people, what Muskogee can offer is just immense."

But for all their plans, Shepherd said, renovating the old, massive hangar had to be the first step.

"People can say, 'well you talk about it, but are you going to do it,' and so that's where we're starting," Shepherd said. "That's why it has to be our focal point."

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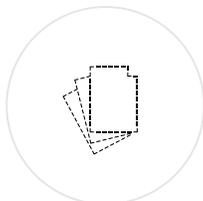


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