

# Oregon Aviation Museum Newsletter

Vol II, No. 4

78833 Airport Road, Cottage Grove, OR 97424

October/November 1989

Still spry at 89

## Art Whitaker, airplane salesman

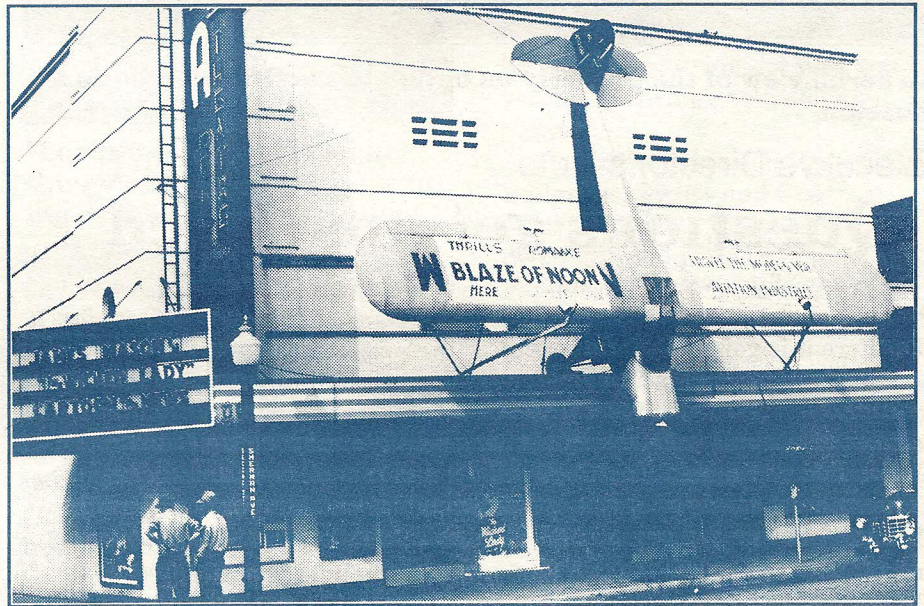
By Pamela Farris

*Pam Farris, a Beaverton resident, is our staff writer who volunteers her time to write our feature articles. We neglected to give her credit for the article on Dorothy Hester Stenzel. Pam's articles are much appreciated and an asset to our newsletter.*

Oregon's rich aviation history included air show performers, record breakers and people who just liked to fly. All of them needed airplanes. That's where Art Whitaker Airplanes Sales and Service came in.

Looking considerably younger than his 89 years, Art Whitaker explained that his interest in flying was sparked in 1914 when he and his brother "crashed" an international aviation meeting in Boston. He was "thrilled to pieces" seeing all of the airplanes, but his first impression was that "none of those things would fly."

Art "really had the bug for flying" so he decided to learn auto mechanics as preparation for a flying career. He worked in local garages in Massachusetts while he went to school. Later, he followed his brother to the West Coast and took a vacation in Seaside. There he fell in love with the assistant postmistress, took a job as an auto mechanic, and decided to stay in Oregon. During that time, he also worked as mechanic for Ralph Hansen who gave airplane rides



A Cub PA11 Special displayed above a theater in Portland.

on the Seaside beach in a Curtis Pusher.

He later moved to Portland and took flying lessons at Eastmoreland airport, soloing in 1921. He also married that year, but it took another five years to convince his wife that flying was safe and that he wanted aviation to be his career.

The fixed base operators of the 1920s were a "pretty scroungey bunch," he said. "They weren't making any money. I thought the sale of aircraft would be more profitable." In 1926, he started selling Eaglerock biplanes and continued until the factory went broke during the Depression. Then

he started selling Taylor Cubs, later bought out by the Piper Company. He also sold Bellancas, Globe Swifts, and Cessnas, but he promoted the Piper Cub because of its affordability.

Art kept selling during those tough economic times. He targeted the group (doctors, lawyers, and teachers) unaffected by the economy and "...conceived the idea of organizing flying clubs to stay in business."

Customers would buy into a new airplane and split the cost of maintenance based on the number of hours each individual flew. Each person also paid his own gas

**Continued on page 3**



An aerial view of the property on option to the Oregon Aviation Museum.

## Executive Director's Note

# Questions get answered

Do any of you wonder where the Oregon Aviation Museum is? Or where it is going to be? Or even why we picked the location we did for the museum? Well, here are some answers to those frequently asked questions.

The property is adjacent to the Cottage Grove Airport, on the southwest end of the runway. There are five acres that the Oregon Aviation Museum has purchased an option on. It's a wonderful piece of property for a museum because of its accessibility to I-5. Cottage Grove has a very easy exit to get on or off of I-5 and the museum will be visible from I-5, so it will attract the tourist traveling North or South. It is also central to East and West travel by its location just South of Highways 126 and 58.

The Cottage Grove Airport allows us the access we need to bring in flying aircraft for exhibits or other activities. It also means you as the visitor can fly in or drive in to visit the museum.

The property is bordered by the Row River on the south end which will make a great picnic area upon completion of the

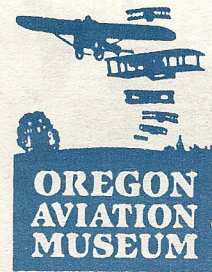
museum grounds.

Gary Moye, the architect for the project has designed a very distinct building using hangar elements of different lengths that join to a circulation gallery. On one end of the gallery there will be an observation deck for viewing airplane traffic and on the other end administrative offices, a library, auditorium, and a gift shop.

Cottage Grove is actively developing its tourism facilities and the Oregon Aviation Museum fits into the plan very well. In the near future there will be a new 18 hole golf course with an RV park, and additional shops and restaurants just down the street from the museum property. The museum will also be close to service stations, grocery and variety stores and other overnight accommodations. The Oregon Aviation Museum blends in with this development very well, making Cottage Grove a destination for tourism in Oregon.

So now that we have a great location and an outstanding architectural design for the

**Continued on page 4**



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Cynthia Bounds

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# Art Whitaker, continued from page 1

and \$1.00 an hour to the local base operator for scheduling and maintaining the airplane. The idea was so successful that Art established over 60 flying clubs in his territory which included Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Western Montana.

Consistently one of Piper's top distributors, Art said he "...had a pretty vivid imagination for advertising his airplanes." In addition to the traditional methods of advertising on the radio and in aviation publications, Art created his own displays. One of his more creative ideas, guaranteed to bring in business, was to hang a Piper Cub from the ceiling of each floor of the Portland Meier & Frank store. He displayed airplanes in the store for two weeks.

Art went "wherever the crowds were." He put on races at county fairs in which he raced a Cub against a car, always allowing the car to win until the last day. That's when crowds were the largest, and Art would win the race.

He sometimes towed an airplane behind a truck or car in a parade, and he never missed an automobile show. He put Piper Cubs on display alongside the new cars of the day. If a theater was showing a movie about flight, Art displayed a Cub in front of the theater or occasionally nose down on the marquee. He also put on weekend demonstrations and offered a 20-30 minute sample flying lesson for \$5.00.

Air shows drew the crowds, and Art was there. He spent two years flying in Tex Rankin's Flying Circus. He performed a "how not to fly" act in which he would dress up as a "72 year old lady taking her first airplane ride. The pilot would start the engine and then be called away on some pretense, leaving me sitting in the airplane with the engine running. I'd open

the throttle, roll it up on one wheel, make a 180 turn, and take off in the opposite direction from where the airplane was originally



**"Looks like I said the right things" - Piper Apache is leaning on me in the background.**

headed." The performance continued as Art bounced, hit the ground, pulled the plane up and hit the ground again as he continued down the runway.

His ideas drew the customers. At a time when people had little money and the Piper Cub sold for \$1475, Art sold approximately a hundred every year.

World War II brought an end to selling airplanes. The U. S. government bought up all available civilian airplanes to use for military training. Art, who had a captain's commission in the Air Force, was excused from active duty at the request of the Reconstruction Finance Company and sent to Sunnyside, Washington, to

straighten out Olympia Air Transport. Olympia trained military pilots but the business was, in Art's words, "a real can of worms." He spent the war years standing off creditors, getting the company out of debt and finishing construction of the buildings. However, he retained his general parts business and approved repair station in Portland.

When World War II ended, Art returned to selling airplanes. Business boomed because of a "real pent-up market." He had his biggest year during the post war years in which he sold 465 airplanes.

He continued to sell Piper Cubs, Bellancas, Swifts and Cessnas until 1961 when he sold his distributorship. He then moved to Pearson Field in Vancouver and, with a partner, started an aircraft brokerage firm and Mooney dealership.

Art "retired" from aviation in 1975 to spend time with his wife before her death in 1978.

Now slowed down by the years and lumbago, Art nevertheless makes daily trips to the Hillsboro Airport. He has completed an RV-4 which is for sale. His next project is to finish his book recalling his experiences in aviation.

Summing up his career in aviation, Art smiles and says, "It was a lot of fun. You have to enjoy a job, and I enjoyed all the years I was in it."

## Give OAM Christmas gifts

Need a Christmas gift suggestion? How about a membership in the Oregon Aviation Museum (See application on page 5). Or perhaps a T-shirt or hat with the museum logo would be just the gift for someone on your list.

T-shirts are available in white, grey or navy blue in sizes small,

medium, large and extra-large. Prices for the shirts are \$8 for adults and \$6 for children.

The hats are a very nice grey corduroy with the museum logo in blue. The price is \$7.

Please include an additional \$1.50 per item for mailing. Be sure to include a telephone number.



## Emergency landing

This Piper J-4 was enroute from Klamath Falls to Eugene when it got caught by darkness and opted to land on Windy Point, about four miles southeast of Wendling. Those pictured skipped school the next day to view the wreckage. TOP ROW LEFT TO RIGHT: Merle Ratterree, Rodney Rogers, Dick Mix, Edwin Allen, Ron Byers, Jack Maycumber. BOTTOM ROW LEFT TO RIGHT: Eldon Pattee, Bob Mosby, George Skordahl, Ed Aldous, Ryan Remont, Doug Skordahl. The date of this mishap was around 1940. (Picture donated to the Oregon Aviation Museum by Ron Byers, 1989.)

## Get life membership now

Tic, tic, tic, the clock is ticking away and time to purchase a lifetime membership is running out. Just two more short months until we no longer offer a lifetime membership as one of your options for membership to the Oregon Aviation Museum. Call the Oregon

Aviation Museum for payment information today and you can beat the clock.

Your lifetime membership will provide you with a lifetime of benefits to the Oregon Aviation Museum, so show your support today. Call 942-9129.

## director's notes, from page 2

museum what else could we want? Well, we need your support and that could come in many different forms. An associate membership, a sustaining membership or even a patron membership helps our membership base grow and gives financial support to the museum. It could mean support in the form of a pledge to the Oregon Aviation Museum Pioneer Capital Campaign. A pledge of this kind will help us to purchase the property. Or it could mean that you have a service or supplies we might need to complete a project. All of these options are great ways to show

your support for the Oregon Aviation Museum, but we need you to act now! Don't wait thinking someone else is already helping or that what you have may not be enough, because every little bit helps. You may call the museum office at 942-9129 for more information on how you can help. A membership application is in this newsletter and you can send pledges for the Pioneer Capital Campaign to the Oregon Aviation Museum, Inc., 78833 Airport Road, Cottage Grove, OR 97424. Show your support, make a pledge today!

## Planning group sets a course

The Oregon Aviation Museum's Planning Committee is off and running. The six member committee will decide many of the issues involved with building the Oregon Aviation Museum. They will determine construction costs, projected phases of development, costs of exhibit development and costs of operations and maintenance, a tough job for this committee but one they can handle.

Committee members include Bud Betz, John Hoopes, Gary Moye, Roger Sinclair, Tom Urban and Cynthia Bounds.

## OAM office needs volunteer help

Part time office help is needed. We would like to staff the museum office each day of the week from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., but in order for us to do that we need your help. The museum has only one paid staff person and that is our Executive Director. She can't always be in the office so we need volunteers to answer the phone, do light typing, send out membership information and be available to talk with people who stop by the museum office.

We have divided the six hours each day into two shifts, the morning shift from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. and the afternoon shift from 1:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. We have asked people who are interested in volunteering to pick a day and a time that works best with their schedule.

If you would like more information on how you can become a museum volunteer please call the museum office 942-9129. (You might have to leave a message on the answering machine because we don't have all of our office help as yet).

## Volunteer highlight

# McLean and Heath pitch in

There have been a number of people who have helped the Oregon Aviation Museum this summer but we would like to highlight two of them in this newsletter. These two individuals have shown a great deal of dedication to the museum and it is worth mentioning.

Margaret McLean just joined our volunteers this summer but she caught on very quickly. She helped staff the museum's booth at the Lane County Fair and was able to work when no one else was available. She has helped set up displays, talked with people about the museum and did a great job of selling merchandise. Margaret sat in the rain with us at the Eugene Celebration and almost froze but that didn't stop her, she has come back and continued to help. She has been very patient with us while we were learning and being busy. Thank you Margaret!

Our top salesperson this summer was Catherine Heath. No matter what air show we were at or where we were trying to sell our

wares, Catherine could out sell everyone. Catherine not only sold the most merchandise but she made sure to tell everyone about the progress of the Oregon Aviation Museum.

She also helped construct our

float which appeared in the Bohemia Mining Days parade and the Eugene Celebration parade. Catherine's energy and dedication really helped the Museum this summer.

Thank you, Catherine!

## List of items we need

A museum supporter doesn't always mean that a cash donation has to be made. There are many items that the Oregon Aviation Museum needs that you may be able to help with. So if you see something on the list below that you might be able to help with please let us know. Call the museum at 942-9129 or write 78833 Airport Road, Cottage Grove, OR 97424.

Answering Machine  
Copying Machine  
Paper Cutter  
Computer paper (8 1/2 X 11)  
15 sheets of plywood

Glass display cases  
Storage space for aircraft & engines  
Financial assistance with photos for duplication  
Photographs that need to be framed  
File Cabinet  
Typewriter stand

**NOVEMBER**  
**Aviation History**  
**Month**

## Yes...I want to help!

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

### I wish to become a Museum member:

\$10 Annual Associate       \$25 Annual Family       \$50 Annual Sustaining

\$100 Benefactor       \$250 Lifetime       \$500 and up Patron   
(Until 12/31/89)

\$500 Corporate Sponsor

Send to: Oregon Aviation Museum, Inc., 78833 Airport Road, Cottage Grove, OR 97424

# Museum receives memorabilia

August, September and October have been very exciting months for donations to the Oregon Aviation Museum. Some special people have taken a great deal of time, energy and/or money to make these donations possible and the Oregon Aviation Museum is very grateful for their efforts.

Ben Deatherage of Cottage Grove, a Hump pilot from WWII donated a copy of the Hump Pilots Association China-Burma-India History Vol. 2 to the museum in August. In September, Ben persuaded Jack Corns of Strasburg, Ohio, to donate a copy of Vol. 1 to the museum. We now have a complete set. These two books are outstanding additions to the museum's growing library and very much appreciated.

Mrs. Betty Sharp, a previous contributor of items that belonged to her husband, Dr. Paul Sharp, has again gifted the Oregon Aviation Museum with several items from the Oregon Air Tours of 1937 and 1939, including a beret autographed by Tex Rankin. Betty's generosity is continuing to add to our collection of Oregon's aviation history.

George Zoller was an airline mechanic in 1943 when he began collecting Air Transport maga-



Old books, photos and wood airplane skis are in the collection.

zines, and he collected every issue for several years. Last month George donated them to the Oregon Aviation Museum, along with an original banner for American Airlines and the Interstate Airlines U.S. Mail Route.

Mrs. Chet Stinson Wachter of Klamath Falls has given two pairs of wood airplane skis dated around the 1930's in the memory of her husband Chester Eliza "Chet"

Stinson. The skis are in wonderful condition and are much appreciated.

These are just some of the highlights of donations to the Oregon Aviation Museum over the past couple of months and donations continue to come in. The museum can't say enough how much it appreciates these contributions. Watch for more information on additions to the collection.

Oregon Aviation Museum, Inc.  
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