

Suburban Life

Loraine McClish editor/477-5450



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Pilots Phyllis Wood of Redford, Sherry Giesler of Farmington Hills and Joanne Daniels of Ypsilanti are all members of The Ninety Nines who are working towards the building of a museum to preserve the history of women in aviation. Giesler and Daniels are on the six-member committee committed to completing the job.

The Ninety Nines

Women pilots begin search to preserve their heritage

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

Women have been involved in aviation almost since its beginning but you wouldn't know it if you relied upon the exhibits at a local aviation museum.

And several area women have set out to preserve their heritage and set the record straight.

When Yankee Air Force, the only private museum to boast its own B-52 bomber, was dedicated at Willow Run, a number of women pilots attended.

And according to Sherry Giesler, "We were very aware that there was nothing there to show that women had anything to do with aviation at all."

"We have been given our own room and storage space now to start our own museum. The next step is to fill it."

The "we" she speaks of are six area pilots, all members of The Ninety-Nines, an educational organization for women pilots, who have launched a search for memorabilia of women aviators. They want to establish the first museum highlighting the accomplishments of these women.

Giesler, a co-owner of Designs on You in Farmington, is working to get the museum under way with Marie Littler of Farmington Hills, Gini Southerland of Birmingham, Mearl Frame of Rochester, Susan Philpot of Grosse Ile and Joanne Daniels of Romulus.

All of the pilots agree that the time to honor women in aviation is long past due.

"The Smithsonian Institute doesn't even recognize these women with a collection," said Littler, who is a flying instructor at Willow Run as well as a teacher at Woodcreek Elementary School in Farmington Hills.

SOUTHERLAND, who flies a Cherokee 180 out of Oakland-Pontiac airport, says, "We're losing those original Ninety-Nines and fast. What we're hoping is that either the relatives or the heirs will have records, pictures, uniforms, anything of history, and our museum is where they will want them preserved."

The original Ninety-Nines Southerland spoke of were the 99 charter members of the organization brought together by Amelia Earhart about 50 years ago for aviation education clinics, safety education, fly-in monthly meetings and group flying activities.

Closer to home, the Yankee Air Force was planned to research, restore and preserve the all-but-forgotten history of Willow Run Airport, and obtain one of the 8,700 B-24 bombers that were built by Ford Motor Co. during World War II to be permanently on display there.

"All of those planes are all but rotted away now," said Frame, who flies a Cessna Cardinal. "It is going to be some job to reclaim one of them and bring it

up to specs so it is worthy of the museum. What we're doing now is writing letters to anybody who we think knows anybody who has anything salvageable that should be preserved before it gets rotted away."

"THE HISTORY we're looking for is so ragged because it's all under cover," Littler said. "It's all in somebody's attic and we've got to get it before it goes out in the trash."

"When you say 'woman aviator' what else comes to mind but Amelia Earhart," Giesler added, "or maybe now Sally Ride, but even her many contributions to aviation would have been hidden except for the publicity that surrounded her when she was chosen as the first woman in space."

While the Ninety-Nines membership is only for women pilots, the women want it to be known that Yankee Air Force is for everyone interested in any facet of aviation, and so will be the museum room dedicated to women in aviation.

Littler said so far she has one contribution for the museum room, a Civil Defense spotter's hat, used in World War II, that she picked up at a garage sale.

"That's part of our history," Giesler said. "The woman that wore that hat could identify every single type of plane that was flown during those years."

Of particular interest to the collectors are the women pilots who were hired by Ford Motor Co. to

fly the bombers from Willow Run to their U.S. destinations.

"Those women, and they had to have lived here or close by during the war years, have got to have a wealth of information, as well as memorabilia for us," Giesler said.

"They were all well trained and all disbanded before the end of the war with no benefits and no recognition," Littler said.

YANKEE AIR opened in 1981 in a formerly unoccupied building owned by Wayne County Road Commission. The aviation enthusiasts who operate the museum now number 1,200 and pay rental of \$1 a year.

Though they have never fulfilled their first and original goal of getting a B-24, the search does continue. Meanwhile the members have their own hangar containing a library, an accumulation of aviation history, military aircraft, artifacts and memorabilia.

"We're starting our room with not much more than space," Frame said. "We are going to need paint, cabinets, display cases, and we'll also take money to help us pull this history all together."

Southerland can be reached by calling 642-8756. Frame can be reached by calling 652-9688. Giesler can be reached at 476-1150 during business hours and at 349-1747 in the evenings.

"We have been given our own room and story space now to start our own museum. The next step is to fill it."
— Sherry Giesler



'Tis the Season

"'Tis The Season" is the name of Farmington Community Chorus' holiday concert, and it's also the time chorus member Sue McLean (at left) director Jim Whitten, accompanist Susan Garr and singer Bryan Stewart practice their choreography to go with the holiday music. Curtain is 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Dec. 14-15 in Harrison High School's Centre for the Performing Arts, 29995 12 Mile Road. Tickets are \$2.50, or \$1.50 for students and seniors and may be purchased in Department of Special Services, Farmington Hills City Hall, or at the door.

Library observes Deaf Heritage Week

Farmington Branch Library celebrates National Deaf Heritage Week Sunday Dec. 2 through Sunday Dec. 9 with a display to help increase public awareness of impaired hearing, and a film, Saturday, Dec. 8, in the library at 23500 Liberty.

The display of books, magazines, telecommunications device (TDD), a telecommunication device to use with TV sets, captioned videocassettes, a slide presentation on deaf awareness, reference and referral information pertaining to deafness and hearing impairment will be open 2-5 p.m. in the library's auditorium.

The captioned film, "In Search of the Castaways," will be shown along with the regular sound track for hearing audiences at 2:30 p.m. The Jules Verne story, filmed in color, stars Haley Mills, Maurice Chevalier and George Sanders.

The event is sponsored by the library free for guests to gain insight into the non-hearing world.

Visitors are also invited to inquire about the library's new TTY. This is a portable, typewriter-like machine which enables speech or hearing impaired persons to communicate over telephone lines to the Farmington Hills Branch Library.

NATIONAL DEAF Heritage Week

was declared by the Council of the American Library Association in Washington, D.C., to be celebrated by libraries, especially public libraries, in cooperation with the deaf community throughout the nation.

Approximately 17-million Americans are hearing impaired, and it is expected this number will increase due to illness, noise, accident, heredity, greater longevity and, ironically, better medical care, which now saves the lives of children but may leave them with a hearing impairment.

Deafness is an invisible disability which is unrecognized and misunderstood by most hearing people, according to the American Library Association. It is a double-edged handicap because the disability of not being able to hear causes the disability of communication.

The association credits the public libraries as being most instrumental in bringing about public awareness of the deaf with their programs, which started nationwide in 1974.

Since that time other factors that have helped are the National Theater of the Deaf, which has toured the U.S. as well as appeared on TV, the closed captioning of TV programs and "Children of a Lesser God," the Tony Award-winning play about deafness which starred a deaf actress.