

PORT REPORT



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SUMMER 2024 NEWSLETTER *from the* PORT OF PORT TOWNSEND



Spruce Goose Café flies on with new owners

Chris Cray and Andrea Raymor, front, are selling the famous Spruce Goose Café at the Jefferson County International Airport to longtime staff members. In back, from left: Kathryn McKenney, Vanessa McKenney and Ashley Owen.

INSIDE: What makes JCIA unique?: 4-5 It's more than a museum: 6-7

Commissioner's Corner

Second-generation JCIA pilot loves 'gemstone' of JCIA

In a corner of the Port Townsend Aero Museum hangs a dusty, old floatplane with the word "Kurtzer" emblazoned on the side. My mom bought my dad, Pete Hanke Sr., flight lessons in that little plane from Lana Kurtzer, one of our most famous aviators in the Pacific Northwest.



By Pete Hanke
Commissioner
District 3

Molly. This was 1996, and the Seattle SuperSonics were still going strong. Molly loved basketball so we spent many nights circling Puget Sound with KIRO 710 sports radio tuned in on the ADF for the game. It was great practice for night flying.

JCIA is an amazingly unique airport. Given the fact that it is constricted by two highways and constructed over a swamp, it has defied the odds of survival for a general aviation airport. Also, because of the topography around the airport, JCIA can be one of the more challenging airports at which to land. The wind has a nasty habit of changing direction almost minute by minute at times.

But overlaying these challenges is the setting. JCIA lies to the northeast of the Olympic Mountains. When you drive down the incline into the airport on a beautiful, clear morning

the scene is so beautiful it defies reality.

The takeaway from this reminiscing is that regardless of the area -- Boat Haven, Point Hudson, Quilcene or JCIA -- there is amazing history and community. For JCIA, the people have made and still make the place. Andrea Raymore and Chris Cray keep us all fed while maintaining the beating heart of JCIA, the Spruce Goose Café. Summer Martell and her biplane, the Student Prince, connect the wonder of flight in a story no one could ever imagine.

Scott Erickson at Tailspin Tommy's keeps all things flying. Mike Payne faithfully, patiently and affably greets everyone who comes through the doors of the Port Townsend Aero Museum with a smile and an answer.

And finally, Mort Robinson's love affair with flight keeps us all flying. So yes, it is many circles and intersections that connect people to place and make JCIA a true gemstone in the world of general aviation.



In 1996, Pete Hanke, Jr. showed his new pilot's license after completing flight training at Jefferson County International Airport.

Thus began a lifelong love affair with flying and the Jefferson County International Airport (JCIA) both for dad and me.

Dad began flying into JCIA in 1968, when we moved the schooner "Alcyone" to Port Townsend. Our family farmed in the Yakima Valley and flying to JCIA was a convenient way to get to and from the farm. Back in those days, there was a grass landing strip, which he preferred. Transportation to town, just has now, demanded novel thinking.

At first we would pile into the old Chevy Grayline Transportation bus and trundle into Port Townsend and the Boat Haven Marina. That soon gave way to a 1956 Buick Roadstar, nicknamed 'the Bomb.' The Bomb, lived next to what eventually became Tailspin Tommy's repair shop, and anyone needing to get into town knew the key was under the mat.

Just over 40 years later from dad getting his first flying lesson, my wife Sherri gave me flying lessons through Port Townsend Airways. Sue Nelson, now our lease coordinator at the Port, was Port Townsend Airways administrator. I learned to fly from a new instructor named

From the Executive Director

Airport plays a critical role for county



By Eron Berg

Port Executive
Director

This Port Report is focused on the Jefferson County International Airport, a 303-acre property that is home to a 3,000-foot paved and lit runway, more than 100 based aircraft, a remarkable museum, excellent restaurant and a community centered around general aviation. The Port of Port Townsend first leased Army Airfield Station Prairie on June 14, 1945 and took over ownership and operations in 1959.

JCIA provides Jefferson County with access to the air. While most of the flights in and out of the airport are recreational, the airport serves as a primary landing zone for AirLiftNW and

LifeFlight which operate medical evacuation services. It is also used by the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard for search and rescue and training missions, and by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for staging aircraft on wildfire missions. The airport is also used by businesses throughout Jefferson County.

JCIA is part of the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS). That means it is both regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and largely funded by the FAA. Federal funding for capital projects at JCIA generally cover 90 percent of the eligible projects costs.

One of the more vital functions of the airport is for use in emergencies. JCIA is planned as a staging area for food and supplies by the Disaster Airlift Response Team in the event Hood Canal Floating Bridge and highway travel is disrupted. This team, called DART for short, conducted a training exercise at JCIA in early June.

Future plans for the airport include more privately built and owned hangars, and the addition of non-aviation related light industrial space.

Within the 303 acres at JCIA are about 50 acres that could be used to support business growth. The Port has heard from EDC Team Jefferson and many businesses that they are outgrowing their existing space, and without new light industrial land, are unable to grow. Some have studied outside of Jefferson County. Using some of the currently underutilized land at JCIA to support businesses that create good jobs is squarely in the Port's mission and something the Port is eager to support.

Finally, after many years on hiatus, Airport Day is back! Save the date, Aug. 3, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The party will include tours of the airport and some of its most interesting airplanes, along with more information about JCIA's role in our community.

As always, I welcome your comments, thoughts and questions about the Port. Please contact me.

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Spruce Goose: New owners. Same great pies.

After 25 good years, Andrea Raymor and Chris Cray have found exactly the right people to slide into the pilot's seat of the famous Spruce Goose Café at the Jefferson County International Airport.

As of July 1, a trio of young women who have been working at the Spruce Goose for years will become the new owners. Two are sisters – Kathryn McKenney, 23, and Vanessa McKenney, 25. Ashley Owen, 33, will manage the kitchen. All three grew up in Port Townsend.

Raymor and Cray couldn't be happier.

"We've been trying to sell the business, and our customers have said they don't want anything to change," said Raymor of the loyal patrons who pack the little café for breakfast and lunch. The new owners know the patrons, know the menu, and know the Spruce Goose's vibe in a way that no outsider could. "It's going to be good for them, and it's going to be good for everyone," said Cray. "It's going to change their lives."

Buying the Spruce Goose on 25 years ago from Jeannie Sather and Janet Russ, certainly changed Raymor's and Cray's lives. When the pair started as owners on March 6, 1999,

Raymor said, they thought they'd give it five years. "We kept missing that deadline," she said, now a quarter-century later. "But it's been a good run."

Family considerations prompted the decision to find new owners. Cray seeks more time to assist her parents and be with her six grandkids. Raymor's mother lives in Mexico and she wants the flexibility to go when needed. But neither is done with the Spruce Goose.

Raymor will work certain shifts for the new owners, and Cray said she will always be available to fill in when needed. Usually, the busiest time is the summer, so longtime customers can expect to see both of them.

Then there's the matter of the pies: marionberry, apple, cherry, rhubarb.

Spruce Goose pies bring flyers to JCIA from all over the state, even the country. The National Pilot's Association announced the Spruce Goose had the best pies of any airport café in the country. The pie recipe started with Ila Bishop, who passed it on to her daughter, Jeannie Sather, who then passed it on to the Cray and Raymor. Now it will be passed on to "the young generation," as Raymor calls them.



Chris Cray, left and Andrea Raymor have owned and operated the Spruce Goose Café at JCIA for 25 years. They are happy to be selling it to three young employees, to whom they will also pass on the secrets of the pie recipes that have made the café famous.

Ashley Owen already makes the Goose's crunch pies. Vanessa McKenney is an experienced baker and chocolate maker.

Owen has been working in the Spruce Goose kitchen since 2012, hired as a cook and dishwasher. Kathryn McKenney

was having lunch there in early 2020 when she was asked if she wanted a job. She took it, and was so good at it that the owners asked if she had a twin. Not quite – but her sister Vanessa, two years older, joined the staff a few months later.

The trio's first interest is in learning all they can from Raymor and Cray. They promise the same exceptional pies, the same homemade, fresh soup and food, the same friendly service. The secret ingredient to all of it, said Raymor, is love.

The menu will stay as is. Kathryn noted that the last time the menu was changed, customers kept ordering the food that was on the old menu. "The customers really have us trained around here," she said. "They're not going to let us do too much."

But in the future, the new owners may decide to open up on Mondays (the café is now open Wednesday through Sunday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

Cray, who is also a real estate agent, said one of the most exciting things is providing these young women with a chance to grow the business and, in the future, give them resources toward purchasing a home. "It's so hard for young people to become a first-time home buyer," she said. In addition, the transition is good news for the dozen employees of the café.

Speaking for the new owners, Kathryn said they are excited to build on the foundation left by Cray and Raymor. "Chris and Andrea have built an awesome business," she said. "It'll be fun. We'll all be doing the same thing we've always been doing, with a little more work behind the scenes. We're very excited."



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It's more than the pie! Pilots love our little airport

Every pilot – local or visitor – agrees. There's something special about the Jefferson County International Airport (JCIA).

It's not the runway, although it's been recently improved. It's not the airplanes, although JCIA is known for an eclectic combination of aircraft, including well-loved restorations and experimental projects

It is, instead, the people.

"The people are special here," said 89-year-old, longtime pilot Mort Robinson. "They are lovely and brilliant. They're what make it such a wonderful place."

Dean Sanders, flying here since the early 1990s, agreed.

"Everybody has told me they have never seen an airport where there was such camaraderie among the pilots

and the other people at the airport," he said. "You don't find that at other airports. Everybody is willing to help and it's a beautiful airport community. It's very special."

Pete Hanke, Jr., a second-generation pilot at JCIA and a current Port of Port Townsend commissioner, called it "a gemstone" for its friendly and unique characteristics.

To be sure, many of the 100-plus airplanes based at JCIA are also a fascinating mix. In part, that comes from the influence and abilities of the Port Townsend Aero Museum, located at the airport with expert staff and young volunteers who have gained an international reputation for restoring antique airplanes. Some three dozen aircraft are on display in the Museum. Michael Payne is the Museum's director, and is well-known to local pilots for doing quality work. In that role, he is



Mort Robinson, 89, sits in the cockpit of his Grumman airplane in the hangar space he rents from longtime pilot Warren Erickson at JCIA. Stenciled below Robinson's cockpit is "The Impossible Dream," a reflection of the way Robinson sees the wonder of flying. *Photo by Dean Sanders*



Mort Robinson stands with Warren Erickson at the propeller of Erickson's airplane. *Photo by Dean Sanders*

following Museum founder Jerry Thuotte, who started it with his wife Peggy in 2001 and who built the Museum building in 2008.

JCIA also attracts people willing and able to do their own restoration or experimental aircraft work, and interesting small aircraft are in hangars all over the place. "These airplanes are different from what you would see at Bellingham or Everett," said Robinson. "These are eclectic, special, antique and restored airplanes. When people open their hangars, I'm amazed at the beauty of 90 percent of the airplanes we have. It's a higher scale."

One pilot, he said, is installing a Ford Model A engine for an airplane.

The generous personality of the pilot community has grown out of many people of the past and present. Pilots mentioned some who are gone such as Dick Wiley, George Capriotti, Brad Brown, Pete Hanke, Sr., Ted Belgard, Bob West and Roth Mason, aka "the judge." Some have moved away such as Tommy Wacker and Erik Lindbergh. Some have shifted away from flying like Steve Goodwin.

Many are still flying out of JCIA such as Warren Erickson, Summer Martell, Pete Hanke Jr., Neil and Linda Morrison, Gary Lanthrum, Eric Taylor, Sebastian Eggert, Mag Steinsuik and others. Both of the Morrisons were airline captains. Linda is retired; Neil

is still active. They own 10 airplanes.

Almost all rely on Scott Erickson, a pilot and airplane mechanic who owns and operates Tailspin Tommy's. In that role, Erickson hosts the annual JCIA Christmas party in his historic hangar.

All pilots rave about the Spruce Goose, JCIA's friendly little airport café, owned by Andrea Raymore and Chris Cray. Its pies, nationally famous, draw much visiting air traffic to Port Townsend. The locally popular café also forms the most solid link between non-flying locals and the airport.

The pilots themselves are an eclectic bunch. Local oldtimers

know Erickson, whose Erickson Towing business occupied the site now used by the Pourhouse. Eric Taylor is today called “the mayor” for his steadfast involvement in support of the airport.

Mort Robinson, a retired Hughes Aircraft chemist and now a spry 89, moved to Jefferson County 30 years ago. Warren Erickson became not just a friend but a business partner with whom he bought and sold perhaps 45 airplanes over the years.

Robinson flies almost every day, and his love of flying is infectious. He’s flown into every state in the country, and beyond to Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Scotland. He estimates he’s flown over to Seattle almost 1,000 times.

Robinson said there’s no feeling in the world as liberating as climbing into the sky in a small airplane. It’s a feeling he wishes everyone could share. That’s why he has stenciled on his



Dean Sanders and Ruth Garasi stand by their V-tail airplane.
Photo by Dean Sanders

fuselage: “The Impossible Dream.”

Dean Sanders learned to fly at JCIA from George Davis when the landing strip was still grass. Sanders has been an active participant and observer at JCIA over many years, watching and photographing improvements such as the repavement of the airstrip and the repair of subsequent engineering problems over the last five years. “It’s fine now; it’s a beautiful runway,” he said.

Just one benefit of flying, Sanders said, is how quickly you get places. He and his wife Ruth Garasi fly their 1958 Bonanza J35 to the San Juan Islands in about 20 minutes. A car trip with ferry can be over six hours.

“You can see why I’d rather fly,” he said.

Like so many others, he does, regularly, from the Port’s beautiful and friendly little airport.



Commercial jet pilot Summer Martell has restored and flies her 1931 Student Prince biplane from JCIA. It’s the same airplane her father Bryan flew when she was a child. *Photo by Dean Sanders*



Pilots, their friends and others involved at Jefferson County International Airport gathered at Scott Erickson’s Christmas Party in Tailspin Tommy’s hangar in December 2023 for this group photo.
Photo by Dean Sanders

Aero Museum teaches, displays, works & flies

In 1928, an airplane manufacturer called Travel Air produced a biplane which proved to be an ideal aircraft for providing the newly formed Airmail Service in effort to speed up mail delivery. After that useful life, one particular model wound up neglected in a shed in Philadelphia, Penn. Its metal frame rusted, its linen skin wasted away and its engine sat idle.

Many years later, word of the Travel Air got to Jerry Thuotte of Port Ludlow, creator and director of the Port Townsend Aero Museum. Soon enough Jerry had arranged for a teenage museum volunteer named Kevin Vogel, eager to learn aircraft

restoration skills, and Kevin's father, to fly back to Philadelphia where they would rent a truck to load up the parts and drive them back to Jefferson County.

Fast-forward to today.

Jerry Thuotte built the Aero Museum and got its programs underway, working with committed young people. He retired in 2016, and died in early 2021.

A former auto shop foreman, Michael Payne, is now director of the Aero Museum, located in four significant buildings at the Jefferson County International

Airport (JCIA). A grown-up Kevin Vogel is there too, now the bearded restoration shop manager.

That bi-plane has been fully restored with a new frame, Dacron skin and a rebuilt engine. It is capable of flying, and has lifted off from JCIA many times. But on this day it sits as one of three dozen antique airplanes inside the Aero Museum's display hall. Along its fuselage, it bears the restored lettering for the Pacific Air Transport Air Mail.

Nearby is a bright red 1937 Beechcraft Staggerwing in mint condition. Payne said it was the

Lear jet of its day – fast, sturdy and reliable. Nearby is a restored 1938 De Havilland tiger moth, British-built, which explains, Payne joked, why the engine is upside down and the propeller spins backwards.

The Aero Museum is much more than a gathering place for the presentation of antique airplanes. It's a place where local young people between the ages of 13 and 18 come to learn new skills and – literally – new horizons as they become adults. Under close supervision, these young people learn from experienced professionals how to restore aircraft, and also, for those who want, to fly.

Many have become pilots, guiding aircraft into the freedom of the air. Payne estimated that up to 40 young people have become pilots through museum, with many others going on to pass tests and obtain pilots' licenses after they left Jefferson County.

The museum is a non-profit with an educational mission and a business plan.

The young people who seek it out and pass muster by proving they are responsible and serious, learn not just restoration skills but how to be a pilot – all at no cost. A youngster can get a pilot's license in a couple years. One student did it in a year.



The Port Townsend Aero Museum's distinct wing shape is the first thing seen by visitors to Jefferson County International Airport.

“It’s the kids that make this program special,” said Payne. “When they work on an airplane, even if it’s doing the taping and preparation before a paint job, they come out of it feeling proud to have been part of it.” Projects are set aside for intensive student work, the current one being a 1946 Ercoupe, a single engine monoplane. During the school year, weekends are when most of the younger people can be found volunteering at the Aero Museum.

The business plan involves getting paid to restore privately owned airplanes, some antiques and some modern. That’s what Payne calls “contract work” and, taking up about three-quarters of the workload, it’s sufficient to pay the salaries of the two fulltime employees – Payne and Vogel – and a bit of part-time work.

The museum also benefits from a platoon of volunteers, most of them pilots. They greet people at the front desk, they can assist with restoration work, and some are volunteer flight instructors for the young people.

The full cohort of 17 youngsters also get involved in contract work up to their level of skill, Payne said, and especially with stitching together the lightweight Dacron skin of wings and fuselage. But all that is done under close supervision. All the critical mechanical, electrical and painting jobs handled by the pros.

Likewise, Payne and Vogel earn money for the Aero Museum by doing professional inspections of aircraft being bought or sold.

The Aero Museum’s display hall was a multi-year project completed in 2008. The display hall completed a \$2 million, 5,400-square-foot expansion last year. Payne’s plan for the near future is to add more interactive displays, including QR code signage that leads to more airplane-specific information.

There are three other Aero Museum buildings at JCIA. Next to the display hall and part of the same campus are the Paint and Fabrication Shop completed in 2010 and the Restoration & Maintenance Building completed



Some three dozen airplanes, mostly antiques with many of them restored by the young people and staff of the Aero Museum, are suspended or on the ground inside the display hall of the museum. It is the first building visitors see at the Jefferson County International Airport.

in 2012. Elsewhere at JCIA is another large hangar full of airplane projects that are awaiting restoration work.

Payne has been a pilot since

1988, but his professional background is in auto mechanics. He was the service manager for Nelson Chevrolet, a large Seattle auto dealer, commuting for an hour each way from his suburban home, when he decided he needed a change.

That brought him to Sequim, where he set up an auto restoration shop. He bought a used Cessna, and wanted to learn more about airplane engines and mechanics. That led a Sequim friend to suggest a visit to Thuotte, who was getting the Aero Museum off the ground in Port Townsend.

That was in late 2002. Payne volunteered two days a week, working with both Jerry and Peggy Thuotte and the youngsters. He also credits Thuotte, a retired commercial airline pilot, with greatly expanding his skills as a pilot.

After a year and a half, Payne told Thuotte he’d need to drop his volunteer work because he needed to earn an income. Thuotte thought for a minute, then said:

“I need three things. Can you be fulltime here? What salary do you need? Will you be on the board of directors?” Payne thought about it overnight, and said yes. A few days later, Thuotte convinced the Board to hire Payne. When Thuotte retired, Payne was the obvious choice to step up into his role.

Looking ahead, Payne casts an eye over at Vogel as he works on a wing. “When I go, it’ll be his turn,” he said. That would be perfect for a unique organization that builds bridges between the generations whose common interest is flight, and the machines that make it possible.



Michael Payne stands in front of the spruce framing of a World War II-era trainer airplane made by the Waco Aircraft Company. A private customer contracted the Aero Museum to do a complete restoration. The airplane had been stored for 40 years prior.



JEFFERSON COUNTY AIRPORT DAY

AUGUST 3RD, 2024 | 10AM-3PM

Celebrating Aviation in Jefferson County
and the Port of Port Townsend 100 Year Anniversary



Aero Museum | Airlift NW | Kid Friendly Biplane | Cascade WarBids
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