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Main Line Airport Dedication Ceremony

The ceremony to dedicate the Main Line Airport historical marker, and to honor the fliers and innovators who served from that field, was held on the campus of Ricoh USA, Inc. at 70 Valley Stream Parkway in Malvern (near the intersection of Valley Stream Parkway and Swedesford Road in the Great Valley Corporate Center) on Thursday, October 5, 2017. By 2:00 p.m., the temperature was 70°F, with partly sunny skies and light winds blowing 11-14 mph, ideal for both those attending and the aviators planning to fly over the site. The event was widely-publicized, open to the public, and attracted an audience well in excess of 200 people. The ceremony agenda was diverse, and the crowd was not disappointed.



On Thursday afternoon, October 5, 2017, an audience estimated at some 250 gathered on the east lawn of the Ricoh USA, Inc. campus to participate in the dedication ceremony for the new historic marker commemorating Main Line Airport. Note the shrouded marker to the left of the American flag, awaiting its unveiling. *Courtesy of John O. Senior.*



Main Line Airport historian Roger D. Thorne provides an historical perspective on this nearly forgotten aviation center. *Courtesy of John O. Senior.*



This large linden tree, at the intersection of Swedesford Road and Valley Stream Parkway, is the only remaining physical connection to the site once occupied by the Main Line Airport. In preparation for the ceremony, a yellow ribbon symbolizing remembrance was tied around the tree. *Courtesy of Carol I. Thorne.*



Master of Ceremonies Ian Alexander, here requesting all who were able to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance at the start of the Main Line Airport ceremony. *Courtesy of John O. Senior.*

Marker Dedication Ceremony

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS:

Ian Alexander - Master of Ceremonies

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

Roger D. Thorne – Board Chair, Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society

REMARKS:

Lt. Col. Kevin Berry – Vice Commander, PAWG, Civil Air Patrol

Bill Holmes – Chair, Board of Supervisors, East Whiteland Township

Robert Beggs – Co-Founder, American Helicopter Museum, West Chester, Pa.

Michelle H. Kichline – Chair, Chester County Board of Commissioners

Dennis Dispenziere – Senior Vice President and CFO, Ricoh Americas

Andrew E. Dinniman – Penna. State Senator representing the 19th District

PRESENTING THE MARKER:

Unveiling the Marker:

Anthony Morris, Esq. – Son of Nicholas Waln Morris, Vice-President and flight instructor, Demorr Aeronautical Corporation at the Main Line Airport.

Daniel Kurkjian – Son of Haig Kurkjian, President, Haig-K Aircraft Corporation, the Main Line Heliport.

Reading the Marker Text:

Virginia Devaney Somers – Daughter of Charles Devaney, President, Demorr Aeronautical Corporation at the Main Line Airport.

CLASSIC AIRCRAFT FLYOVER:

As the ceremony concludes, several vintage aircraft from the period of the Main Line Airport will perform (weather permitting) a low-level flyover of the dedication site.

CLOSING & RECEPTION:

At the completion of the Flyover, all are invited to a small reception within the adjacent Ricoh campus.



Mr. Bill Holmes, Chair of the East Whiteland Township's Board of Supervisors, describes the value of preserving the memory of local historic places such as the Main Line Airport. He began serving on the Board in 2008, and was re-elected for a second term in 2014. A 1986 graduate of LaSalle University in Computer Science, Mr. Holmes has been an IT professional at The Vanguard Group since 1995. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*



Representing the Chester County Board of Commissioners, Chairperson Michelle H. Kichline prepares to present a Citation to the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society on the occasion of the MLA Commemoration. Ms. Kichline was elected a Commissioner in 2015 following her judicial appointment to the Board in 2014. A lifelong resident of Tredyffrin Township, she previously served as a Tredyffrin Township Supervisor. Ms. Kichline earned a J.D. degree from Temple University, and spent over a decade as an attorney at Wisler Pearlstine LLP. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*



MLA Marker Dedication Remarks by Robert Beggs

The Delaware Valley is the Cradle of Rotary Wing aviation development in the United States and a significant chapter of rotary wing aviation history was written right here at the Main Line Airport.

Let me take you back. It was 1928. Calvin Coolidge was President, the world is introduced to Mickey Mouse, Charles Lindberg is awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his non-stop transatlantic flight. Airplanes were becoming reliable enough to provide revenue generating service, like mail delivery, but there were few airports in those days and the aviation entrepreneurs of the time needed an aircraft that could safely land without a runway. To do that, you needed something different than a conventional airplane – you needed an aircraft that could spin its wings. Work on the nascent rotating-wing concepts was underway in Europe, but not yet in the U.S. A wealthy Harold Pitcairn of Bryn Athyn, PA collaborated with Juan dela Cierva of Spain and brought the first rotating-wing aircraft to the U.S. It was technically called an autogiro, but the public called it a “windmill plane”, because that is what it looked like in flight. A flying windmill. At the same time, a young E. Burke Wilford (who bought this land) began working on his own design for a rotating wing aircraft. He collaborated with German engineers Walter Riesler and Walter Keiser and together they developed the WRK Gyro –

Significant rotary-wing advancements were made at the Main Line Airport, as articulated by Mr. Robert Beggs, co-founder of the American Helicopter Museum & Education Center in West Chester, Pa. He has served on their Board of Trustees since the organization's inception in 1993. He also chaired the AHS International (formerly the American Helicopter Society) History Committee for many years, and is an expert on the history and development of rotary wing aviation. In 2014, Bob retired from Rotorcraft Division of The Boeing Company, after working there for 31 years, to lead Good Works Inc., a home repair ministry in Coatesville. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

a truly unique rotary wing aircraft that incorporated Cyclic Pitch Control and a Rigid Rotor System. This advancement allowed the pilot to directly control the pitch direction of the rotor disk which improved the agility of the rotorcraft and was an enabling technology for the future development of a practical vertical lift aircraft, the helicopter. It was 10 years later, in 1940, that Igor Sikorsky made his historic flight of a practical helicopter – thanks in great part to the work of Burke Wilford right here at the Main Line Airport.

Within a dozen years after Sikorsky flew, a former Piasecki helicopter designer named Haig Kurkjian negotiated a lease of the Main Line Airport's buildings, hangars, and a small portion of land. His intention was to develop and market a small personal helicopter, and Haig's new company, Haig-K Aircraft Corp, would occupy the former airport for the next 26 years. After 9 years of research and testing, a 2-place prototype called the HK-1 successfully completed its maiden flight in November 1957, becoming the world's first helicopter to successfully utilize a multi-vee belt drive for both main and tail rotors. It was also the world's first helicopter to allow control of all flight operations using a single wheel, thereby enabling the pilot to move up, down, turn, hover, all by means of a single control wheel.

Last but not least, let's remember that the MLA backed up to the homestead of Arthur Young, the creator of the Bell Helicopter.

History has known few more inventive minds than those responsible for the helicopter, mankind's most versatile flying machine. For *rotorheads* like me...this is hallowed ground.

On behalf of the American Helicopter Museum, thank you all for helping the public to appreciate and remember the important people and the technical accomplishments that occurred at this historic location.



MLA Marker Dedication Remarks by Lt. Col. Kevin J. Berry

Distinguished visitors, fellow CAP members, ladies and gentlemen:

Civil Air Patrol's service to our nation began on December 1st 1941 when visionary leaders organized it as a volunteer branch of the Office of Civilian Defense. Its mission: to enlist and train volunteers to aid in our national defense here at home. Six days later, the attack on Pearl Harbor emphasized the need for this new organization.

On that "date which shall live in infamy," Civil Air Patrol was brand new. What was not new is the American Spirit of Volunteer Service! American Patriots, especially volunteers, have always stepped forward to serve our country in times of need.

Here, at the Main Line Airport in Chester County, citizen-volunteers stepped forward and formed the Paoli Squadron, Civil Air Patrol. They served along with 200,000 men and women nationwide providing critical support for CAP missions in defense of our homeland during that time of war.

CAP WWII aircrews performed coastal patrols spotting enemy U-boats prowling our waters; they radioed subs' positions to the Army & Navy whose bombers could then attack and destroy this horrible menace. And when bomber response times often afforded marauding submarines time

Lt. Col. Kevin J. Berry, Vice-Commander of the 1800-member Civil Air Patrol's Pennsylvania Wing, describes the contributions of the CAP's Paoli Squadron during World War II. Col. Berry, who lives near Butler, Pa., has a master rating in CAP Aerospace Education, holds Emergency Services Specialty Qualifications as a Mission Pilot, Communications Unit Leader and Air Branch director, and has served as both a Group and Squadron commander. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

to escape, military leaders decided to equip Civil Air Patrol planes with small bombs and depth charges. CAP volunteer pilots coaxed their heavily laden small planes into the air, and set a course to deliver their deadly cargo to our foes. By war's end, CAP aircrews were credited with sinking two enemy submarines! That achievement alone saved many lives! However, it was the CAP's incredibly valuable wartime Search & Rescue missions, which located downed aircraft and ships in distress, that helped save many, many more lives!

CAP was originally formed to provide civilian air support to aid in the defense of our nation during World War II. Missions included coastal and border patrols, military training assistance, courier services and related activities. Today, we call these Homeland Security missions, and current CAP members continue their faithful service providing amazingly similar mission services!

Civil Air Patrol remains strong and vital 75 years later! Our three Congressionally Chartered missions: Aerospace Education, Cadet Programs and Emergency Services provide important and valuable services to our nation now, as they have since the first day of December, 1941.

And so we stand at the site of the Main Line Airport, along with the "mature tree" which Mr. Roger Thorne has noted as a living marker in his written account of the airport's history. We stand and dedicate this new historical marker, and we stand in remembrance of those who've come before us. By war's end, Civil Air Patrol crews nationwide had flown more than a half-million mission hours; 90 aircraft were lost, and 64 members perished in the line of duty.

There is little in the way of records detailing the individual achievements of the Civil Air Patrol volunteers who served with the Paoli Squadron here at the Main Line Airport. Volunteers often avoid notoriety; their work itself being sufficient reward for their service.

Let us hope our remembrance today, and this new marker, are sufficient witness and an enduring symbol of our grateful respect for those Chester County CAP volunteers, and that, like the mature tree, will stand for many years to come!

In closing it's important to note that perhaps our best tribute to our WWII Civil Air Patrol members' service is that today's Civil Air Patrol volunteers continue to serve this community, our state and our nation with the same motto: *Semper Vigilans! Always Vigilant!* Thank you!



The Main Line Airport commemoration was held on the property of Ricoh USA, Inc. We were honored to have Mr. Dennis Dispenziere, Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of Ricoh Americas, join us as a speaker who, in his remarks, emphasized the importance placed by his company in remembering local history. Mr. Dispenziere was appointed S.V.P. and C.F.O. for Ricoh in the Americas in April, 2017. He is responsible for all Ricoh finance operations in the U.S., Canada and Latin America, and also oversees all information technology. Mr. Dispenziere has served Ricoh in finance and operations for more than 35 years. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*



1958 aerial image showing the former Main Line Airport site along Swedesford Road, presently the location of the Ricoh USA, Inc. building, the new historic marker, and the old linden tree. *Courtesy of Dan Kurkjian.*

State Senator Andrew E. Dinniman represents Pennsylvania's 19th District, spoke of the inventiveness and courage of those aviators who created a significant history at the Main Line Airport. Sen. Dinniman has served in his position since 2006. Prior to his legislative tenure, he served as a Chester County Commissioner for 15 years, making him the longest-serving commissioner in county history. Sen. Dinniman has been a teacher, an acclaimed international studies professor at West Chester University, and, as a member of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society, has a love of our local history. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*



An appreciative audience listening attentively. *Courtesy of John O. Senior.*



At the conclusion of his remarks, State Senator Andrew E. Dinniman invited Roger D. Thorne, Board Chair of the TEHS, to the podium, and commended the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society for their perseverance and creativity in honoring the Main Line Airport. *Courtesy of John O. Senior.*





Mrs. Virginia Devaney Somers officially reads the text of the new historical marker upon its unveiling. Mrs. Somers is a daughter of Charles Devaney, the legendary Chester County pilot who first flew upon the land later occupied by the Main Line Airport. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*



The eagerly-anticipated historical marker for the Main Line Airport is officially unveiled on October 5, 2017 by Mr. Tony Morris, son of legendary MLA flight instructor “Nick” Morris, and Mr. Dan Kurkjian, son of famous rotary-wing designer Haig Kurkjian. Less visible stars of this unveiling were Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society president John Senior and his wife Nancy Kimmons, who together designed and created the unique covering for the marker which separated flawlessly at the proper moment. *Courtesy of Pete Bannan, Daily Local News.*

This long-awaited marker, dedicated on October 5, 2017 in East Whiteland Township, Chester County, honors the many contributions to aviation of the Main Line Airport, which stood from the 1920s to 1978. *Courtesy of John O. Senior.*

MAIN LINE AIRPORT

On this site, beginning about 1920, stood one of Pennsylvania's earliest country airfields. Many hundreds learned to fly here, including NASA astronaut Charles “Pete” Conrad. During World War II a Civil Air Patrol squadron helped America battle German submarine attacks along the mid-Atlantic coast. Pioneering rotary-wing development here had a world-wide influence. A disastrous hangar fire in 1977 ended aviation in the Great Valley.

TREDYFFRIN EASTTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2017

