



ABOUT THE TENNESSEE AVIATION HALL OF FAME

Until 2001, Tennessee's extraordinary aviation history seemed to be a rather well-kept secret. The opening of the Tennessee Museum of Aviation, in late 2001 was a turning point that also provided a home for Tennessee's Aviation Hall of Fame. It also began an annual celebration at which those who have contributed to the state's amazing aviation history are formally honored and enshrined.

Bob Minter, Founder of the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame in 1997, partnered with the new museum's founder and benefactor, Neal Melton, in the Fall of 2000 and they began construction and development of the museum adjacent to the active runway at the Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Airport (KGKT) in Sevierville. Most of the aircraft collection are airworthy military aircraft and are flown frequently for museum visitors. Mr. Melton had looked around most of East Tennessee for a suitable site and chose GKT because the airport serves the Smoky Mountains resorts region and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, with more than 10 million park visitors each year; it's the most visited national park in the nation. The area is packed with attractions, activities, shopping and accommodations . . . there is something for everyone. Dolly Parton's world famous *DOLLYWOOD* amusement park is only a few miles from the airport and the museum's front door. Millions visit Dollywood each year as well.

THE TENNESSEE MUSEUM OF AVIATION

Construction of the museum's 50,000 sq. ft. hangar took nearly a year and in December 2001 it opened its doors. Nine months later, the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame held its inaugural Gala and Induction Ceremony. More than 400 attended the event to witness the enshrinement of TAHF's first class of inductees, lead by one of Tennessee Aviation's Living Legends, Evelyn Bryan "Mama Bird" Johnson of Morristown. Mrs. Johnson's 57,640 hours of flying time have earned her numerous accolades including a place in the Genius Book of World Records. Johnson is believed to have more flight time than any woman in aviation history. She managed the airport at Morristown, Tennessee until just before she passed away at 102 years of age in 2012. Fellow inductees also enshrined at the TAHF's first ceremony were FedEx Founder Fred Smith, renowned aviation trainer, Naval aviator and author Bill Kershner and the posthumous induction of Col. Jim Haun of Nashville. Following a distinguished career as a military pilot, Col. Haun became one of Middle Tennessee's most beloved flight instructors prior to his passing in 2001.

Before the aviation hall of fame's first inductions, Mr. Minter, who was AOPA's Southeast Regional Representative for more than 30 years and an accomplished legislative strategist, asked the 103rd Tennessee General Assembly to make the TAHF the state's **Official Aviation Hall of Fame**. The Bill passed

The Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame has been designated by the General Assembly as our state's Official Aviation Hall of Fame and as Tennessee's Official Repository and Archive for Aviation History (TCA 4-1-326)

The Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame, Inc. is a non-profit IRS 501(c)(3) public charity dedicated to preserving Tennessee's aviation history, advancing aviation education, and to honoring those who have made extraordinary contributions to aviation and aerospace.

without a single dissenting vote. About a year later Minter returned to the capitol and was able to successfully have the aviation hall of fame made **Tennessee's Official Repository and Archive for Aviation History** by the 104th General Assembly and he added and the affiliated museum. Since that first inductions gala in 2002, the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame has held the event each year in early-November and by the end of 2020 had enshrined 81 extraordinary people. Classes of four honorees are customarily enshrined of each year, usually in early November.

The criterion for selection and enshrinement is based entirely upon one's significant and enduring achievement or service to aviation for Tennessee, our nation or the world. Those considered must be either a native Tennessean or someone who has made their contribution or service from within Tennessee. Those born in the state can have accomplished their service or achievement from anywhere in the world. Nominations may be submitted any time and are active until the TAHF's Nominations Committee or Board of Electors formally acts upon the nomination.

A look at the aviation hall of fame's website at www.tnaviationhof.org and the members' stories (those thus far honored) reveals an interesting balance among its members. Distinguished careers that include every facet of aviation and aerospace are represented... general aviation, air carriers, airports, astronautics, space exploration, aviation maintenance and the military. The stories are fascinating, and inductees also represent every region of the Volunteer State from East, to Middle and West.

A sampling of those enshrined solidly confirms Tennessee's historic role in our nation's progress and leadership in aviation and aerospace around the world. Walter H. Beech (1891-1950), the founder of Beech Aircraft was a native of Pulaski, Tennessee. Beech was enshrined in 2005. Larry D.Cox, AAE, former president of the Memphis-Shelby County Airport Authority, also enshrined in 2005 has lead Memphis International Airport to world prominence as the busiest air cargo airport in the world, a title it held for over a decade. The renowned aviation legend, aerobatics pilot and WWII hero, Bob Hoover is a Tennessee native, born in Nashville, where he first learned to fly. Hoover was enshrined in 2003 ... and there are many more! More than seven TAHF Inductees have also been enshrined in the National Aviation Hall of Fame.

The Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame occupies a special area in the museum of aviation's beautiful exhibits gallery, designed and constructed by a professional museum firm. While the museum's aircraft and memorabilia collections are focused primarily on and around the Warbirds of WWII fame and honoring those who flew them, the Aviation Hall of Fame is dedicated to Tennessee's aviation history and to those who made it. **The museum and hall of fame are actually two separate IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable entities each with its own governance.** Funding for the Hall of Fame is generated through sponsorships, individual and corporate donations, government and foundations grants and bequests and the Gala is paid for through sponsorships, donations and individual admission ticket sales. Formal invitations are sent to growing base of dedicated supporters and the event is open to the public. To date, more than 8,000 have witnessed the formal ceremony. An invitation and registration form can be downloaded from the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame website.

The Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame's Board of Directors takes its responsibility as the official aviation repository and archive seriously. The stately dedicated area inside the museum of aviation may be "home" for the TAHF but the Board realizes that it is a long way from East to West Tennessee and connecting with Tennesseans interested in aviation history requires programs that serve as an educational outreach. Toward that end the TAHF seeks to partner with a variety of aviation and educational interests throughout the state. In 2008 a significant partnership was established with Middle Tennessee State

University. The MTSU Aerospace has earned a stellar international reputation in the aviation industry for its more than 700 degree programs in aviation administration, flight and maintenance technical training. MTSU's "Gore Research Center" has extraordinary expertise and capabilities in artifact preservation and security. Plans call for access to the database via the internet. The objective is not to attempt to coalesce otherwise far-flung elements and memorabilia into one place, but to identify stories, facts and locations where researchers and aviation history buffs can explore Tennessee's aviation history where it happened. Tennessee is blessed with many local museums like the Rose Center in Morristown, where some of Evelyn Bryan Johnson's memorabilia resides. Other aircraft museums in Tennessee include The Swift Museum Foundation located on the airport in Athens; The Beechcraft Heritage Museum is on Tullahoma's Municipal Airport.

The State of Tennessee built a new State Museum that opened in October 2018. The \$160 million dollar facility is located at the Bicentennial Capitol Mall Urban State Park, adjacent to Capitol Hill in Nashville. Prior to the opening of the new museum, the Tennessee State Museum had not been receptive to the inclusion of Tennessee's aviation history. New leadership at the museum subsequently welcomed a partnership with the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame. The first partnering project was a *Children's Aviation Day* in April 2019 where over 800 homeschooled youngsters enjoyed desktop flight simulators, paper airplane folding and flying contests and Learn To Fly programs. Those attending received complimentary copies of the TAHF's first *TENNESSEE AVIATION LEGENDS Children's Coloring Book*. The coloring books are now distributed free to children and families visiting the Tennessee State Museum daily.

The Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame designed and produced its Aviation Legends Coloring Book in 2017. It shipped and distributed 20,000 copies free of any charges to children during its first 18 months, all in response to requests by K-12 teachers, scout and church groups, airports across the state including aviation events and aviation summer camps. The TAHF plans to produce more STEM compliant educational products and is currently seeking funding to support the project.

In 2020 the Tennessee Association of Museums awarded the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame an *AWARD OF COMMENDATION* for its *TENNESSEE AVIATION LEGENDS Children's Coloring Book*.

In 2021 the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame became the first Charter Member of the National Aviation Halls of Fame Association, a part of the National Aviation Hall of Fame in Dayton, Ohio.

The story will continue...

A few facts:

- The Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame is one of the most prominent and successful state aviation halls of fame in the country.
- Since its inaugural Gala & Inductions Ceremony, each annual event has attracted an average of over 400 attendees... two of which exceeded 530 attendees.
- Please visit our website at: www.tnaviationhof.org

Bob Minter, Founder & Chairman Emeritus

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