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the Magic of the
Mid-America Flight
Museum*



Scott Glover and the Magic of the Mid-America Flight Museum

By Mike Jones

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Pilots like to go places, preferably fast. Let's see: where to go today? Business meetings are great excuses for a flight. Air shows and fly-ins can be great fun, too. Training flights can add some hours — who hasn't explained to an incredulous spouse that we "gotta get night current again?" Young Eagles missions and AngelFlight trips can satisfy the urge as well. But once those basics are handled, sometimes it can be a challenge to find a reason to burn a couple hundred dollars of avgas.

The perfect answer is an aviation museum at an airport. One superb destination is the Museum of Flight at the south end of Boeing Field in Seattle (KBFI). Within a hundred yards you can see both the very newest in aviation and some of the very oldest.

On the other end of the quirky scale is the Triple Tree Aerodrome in South Carolina (SC00). This airport features a small but worthwhile museum of flying aviation at the end of a 7,000 foot grass runway. Way cool!

All that said, one museum stands out from all the others: the Mid-America Flight Museum at Mount Pleasant Regional Airport (KOSA) in mid-Texas. Founded by the energetic serial entrepreneur Scott Glover, this museum is

unique: every airplane in the museum flies, and flies often. Take that, Mr. Smithsonian!

All-Things Aviation

This Museum is a refreshing aeronautical visit because it is not restricted to just one type, mission, make or vintage of aviation. Some museums are extremely focused — such as the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio — and they're wonderful in their own way. But you get the feeling they would practically throw rocks at a Ford Trimotor. With its deep appreciation for the best of piston-powered aviation history, Mid-America is just more fun.

The Museum is located at the north end of Runway 17/35 at KOSA and is housed in three modern hangars plus a couple smaller ones. It also operates a restoration facility in Ohio. Glover and his chief pilot, Andrew Kiest, met me one morning in September to chat and view the action.



Scott Glover leans on his unique Douglas C-41 as he explains its importance. This plane looks like a DC-3 — but it's not. This was the personal transport of General Henry "Hap" Arnold during World War II. Douglas Aircraft designed this plane to out-compete new planes from Boeing. Douglas' original design, the DC-1, was promising. It led to the DC-2 in 1934, which morphed into the C-41, which eventually became the DC-3. Today the DC-3 airframe is considered to be the greatest aircraft design ever. More than 16,000 were built: Glover's C-41, plus the C-47, C-53, R4D, Dakota, R4D-8 and finally the C-117D. They were good investments: the last U.S. military DC-3 retired in 1982.

Glover is an interesting chap; sort of an aviation magician who has worked his spell to create a museum where none should logically survive. Raised in Mount Pleasant, he's everything Texas personified: earnest and eloquent, a "been there, done that" achiever with soft shoulders and sharp eyes. Kiest is somewhat the opposite: laconic and lanky, a slouching western

cowboy with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the horizon. His family moved to Mt. Pleasant about twenty years ago. When he was in high school a long-time friend introduced them to each other. Glover began to mentor Kiest into his flying career. Both men have the intensity of guys on a mission; they're working to change the world.

Their Museum is only open on Saturdays and admission is free. Originally the Museum was open everyday but unplanned visitors interrupted the workflow of maintenance and preservation. By limiting visitors to just Saturday the group gets more work done. As Glover says, "During weekdays, we have a lot on our plate."

Which raises the question: Why in the world do you do this?

Flipping the Switch

In the early years, Glover's father flew a Cessna 172 and Glover was unimpressed. But when he was eight or nine, a visiting pilot gave Glover a ride in an open cockpit WACO biplane. That ride "flipped a switch" for him and he knew aviation was going to be in his blood. He started flying gliders around age 14, soloed on his 16th birthday and got his private license on his 17th.

Glover's business career also took several unusual twists and turns. As a youngster, his parents owned a cattle feed mill in Texas. Glover attended Baylor but returned to the family business for ten years. He then "spun off" to his own mill in Little Rock, AR until one night it literally burned to the ground.

"That was a little bit of a rough period," he recalls grimly. "I was exhausted, no cash, the banks were on me, and it took eleven months to get the settlement from the insurance company. That was a pretty rough bump for me."

Emotionally broken by his financial battles, Glover did what everybody does when they face bankruptcy: he bought a Cessna and opened a flight school. "I took my business cards and went into town," he said with a laugh. "A

month later I had 15-20 students and a couple flight instructors working for me. It was a great break for me, emotionally.”

Gradually Glover migrated into corporate flying. He knew a guy with a Baron who needed a pilot, and then a doctor friend bought a Conquest. Another fellow needed a pilot for his King Air. Eventually Glover flew a Hawker jet for a private family for six years out of BWI.



The Museum is easy to find and fun to fly into. The modern hangars are at the north end of the runway (red arrow). Park at the FBO and they'll either drive you up to the Museum or, as they did in my case, just loaned me a golf cart for as long as I needed it. Don't forget to return their hospitality and buy some fuel.

Throughout all that, Glover had an unrelated dream: the pet food business. “I don't know why, but I really wanted to do that. So we built it from scratch, from absolute ground zero, no customers, and it actually worked.” Glover sold the business in 2015, which is when he put some cash in his pocket and returned to aviation.

Building the Museum

He started Mid-America in 2014 and it's his personal baby: Glover pays all the bills and makes all the deals. First he located a B-25 and a DC-3, then a Corsair showed up, followed by a Mustang. The red and black Stinson Model A tri-motor in American Airlines livery is my personal favorite. He even bought a P-40 at the behest of Kiest. "Andrew is an expensive friend," Glover laughs. "He wanted a P-40 since he was in diapers, so that's his airplane."

With a roster of over sixty airplanes, there truly is something for everyone, including a Ford Trimotor, a Stout Bushmaster 2000 trimotor ("Stout" is a noun, not an adjective), a Stinson Model A trimotor in American Airlines livery, and a Stinson 6000 high wing. Mid-America continues to add unique and interesting planes. Because of Glover's aggressive growth the Museum hears of sales they would have missed years ago. "Like General Arnold's C-41, it's the only one," Glover said. "The opportunity just presented itself."

The bright blue WACO Nine is another example. Glover got a call one night from a person he knew and trusted. The caller briefed Glover about the plane,



The Continental PB4Y-2 Catalina is an enormous flying machine. With long thin wings holding eighteen hours of fuel, more than 3,000 PB4Ys were built. It served as armed reconnaissance, a patrol bomber and air-sea rescue. This particular airframe is new addition to the Museum, and it towers over the Museum's P-39.

its features, its history and its restoration. Glover bought it on the spot. “I didn't even go look at it, I just trusted [my friend],” Glover said.

Today Glover is working on more acquisitions. He recently picked up a much-loved but heavily worn PBY seaplane with a great pedigree. It came from the late Connie Edwards, an avid collector of WWII airplanes and the founder of the Lone Star Flight Museum in southeast Houston (another fine museum on an airport, KEFD, by the way). Glover also is bidding on a 1930-vintage DeHaviland Rapide currently at the Air Force Museum and made an offer on a 1964 Huey helicopter which flew in Vietnam. At least half a dozen of the planes are grand champions from Oshkosh or other major air shows. “Our DC-3 is the most documented combat aircraft of WWII that's still flying in the world today,” Glover explained proudly.

Running the Museum

The goal at Mid-America is to work hard but have fun. The joke around the Museum is, all days are fun, some days just are “funner” than others.

Part of the fun is seeing these antiques in the sky. Glover feels planes either need to be locked-down into a static display or they should be flying often. Occasional flights are hugely dangerous because aircraft systems need to be regularly exercised and maintained: the engines, the tires, the seals, hydraulics and so on. Glover estimates each of his sixty planes fly about thirty hours per year.

“Things can happen [in flight] no matter how careful you are,” Glover explains. “But if we put an airplane into the ground it's going to be something mechanical, something beyond our control. It's not because we did something stupid.”

The goal of the Museum is to serve as a steward of these vintage machines. Both Glover and Kiest take this responsibility very seriously. They were invited

to bring a DC-3 to Normandy in 2019. But Glover feels it's no less safe to make a piston-engine Atlantic crossing today than it was during the war in 1941. The risks are the same: finicky engines, limited performance, icy conditions, long flights at low altitudes. In the end, he didn't want to put the planes at risk.

“Just because you can land in a 25 knot crosswind doesn't mean you should,” Glover concluded knowingly.

The Grumman J2F Duck is a weird-looking bird and I enjoyed a wonderful tour of this exotic machine from well-known radial engine rebuilder Billy Packard who also works at the Museum.

This particular Duck is one of the few aircraft to survive the attack on Pearl Harbor. The plane had a crew of two and a cabin for two passengers. Ducks were used for executive transport, mapping, scouting, sub patrol, air-sea rescue, photographic surveys, reconnaissance, general utility and light transport duties, as well as a tug for aerial gunnery training.



That said, Glover hates to see handsome, flyable planes retired. “The Boeing Museum, the Air Force Museum, they're like a morgue,” he said, ruefully. Having seen the difference at Mid-America, I now am tempted to agree.

The Museum is a magical place for people who really know their vintage airplanes. For those lucky souls, the sky isn't even the limit. Glover mentioned a number of people from Europe who schedule their vacations around a visit to Mount Pleasant. One visitor, a British Airways captain named Nigel, spent “the better part of the whole day here.” Another repeat visitor is a model builder

working on a Corsair replica. “We’re the only guys who let him get in the Corsair and do whatever he wants to do,” Glover said. “We’ll take panels off for him. We show him a good time.”

No Snooty Pilots

Keeping a fleet of antique airplanes airworthy takes an enormous amount of time, patience, skill and most of all, money. “The hardest part of owning a museum is saying ‘No.’ I’m getting really good at it,” Glover said with a laugh.

For example, Glover usually says “no” to people who want to donate their airplanes. Donated airplanes may be in poor condition, or too common, or simply of insufficient historical interest. The Museum’s hangars are full. “The Baby Great Lakes was donated to us. The A-26 is on loan and probably will be donated,” Glover explained. “But we won’t take most airplanes. It would have to be very special.”

Another “no” is reserved for old jets. Aside from the expense, Glover feels they’re just not safe to operate. “They really weren’t safe when they made them in the 1950s and ‘60s,” he explained. “I’ve had two friends punch out of T-33s, and that’s the most docile jet ever made.”



Glover’s search for historically important airplanes knows no bounds. This sprightly blue WACO Nine flew for the Gilmore Gas Company. It’s a three-seat, open-cockpit biplane first manufactured in 1925. The Nine was the world’s first mass-produced plane. Instead of custom-building airplanes to a buyer’s specification, anyone with a check for \$2,500 could walk into the WACO factory and fly home in a production-built WACO Nine right off the factory floor. About 270 units were sold in just two years. As for Gilmore Gas, you know it today as ExxonMobil.

The museum pays all their mechanics; there are no volunteers. This means the safety procedures at the Museum are professional-grade. Two years ago, the team pulled 32 airplanes out of the hangars — big, complex planes like the Corsair and B-25 — flew them for 135 hours in a busy week without a single mechanical issue. “We didn't even lose a spark plug,” Glover remembers proudly. “There's not a museum in the world that could pull even 35 Piper Cubs out, go fly, and not have any maintenance issues. I'm so proud of our guys and what we do.”

Glover also has done a magical job managing the administrative side of the Museum. The FAA often visits the Museum, Glover told me. “They see how



Andrew Kiest stands in front of the Museum's AT-17 Bobcat. This twin-engine trainer was designed and manufactured by Cessna during World War II to bridge the gap between single-engine trainers and complex, powerful, twin-engine combat aircraft. The wing is made of laminated spruce beams with plywood ribs, which led to the moniker the "Bamboo Bomber." It cruised at 150 knots and had a range of 650 nautical miles; about 5,500 units of the five-seat plane were built. Cool piece of trivia: this model plane was featured in the television series "Sky King."

we're trying to preserve these airplanes, we've got a good relationship with them.” Another jaw-dropping example is their insurance company, which Glover would not name, which is willing to work on the honor system. Every airplane is insured with a simple annual fee supplemented with a kicker for each flight-hour. The whole process is done on a spreadsheet at the Museum and Glover simply sends a check once a month. “They don't even send us a bill,” Glover said simply. “They really like what we do.”

Glover also is very careful selecting his pilots. The Museum receives applications from hundreds of prospects, sometimes two or three a day. Applicants consistently have 10,000 flight hours or more. But most don't have the one particular trait Glover is seeking: a willingness to give back to the team.



While Glover primarily collects only flying machines, once in a great while other oddities attract his attention. One example is this ancient Ford limousine, one of three built, which Henry Ford personally used to transport guests.

“In their resumés, they never say how much experience they have polishing an airplane,” Glover said. “If you can't polish, you can't fly. We're looking for people who really want to contribute. You can't just come in, sweep the floor for a week and go fly the Mustang.”

Glover confessed that there are only a handful of things he doesn't like, and snooty warbird pilots are the absolute top of that list. “It's that warbird mentality, stuck on themselves, more money than sense,” he recalls. “It's kind

of crazy, but some owners wouldn't even let people sit in their T-6. I just don't want to be that kind of person.”

In contrast, Glover is all about people touching his planes. He estimates he put 100 visitors into the cockpit of the Corsair at Oshkosh. At the “Thunder Over Michigan” airshow he put 200 kids into the same plane. “There were maybe ten or eleven Corsairs at Thunder,” he recalls, “and we were the only Corsair that even had anybody standing by the airplane.”

In 2020, he hopes to take the Museum’s Ford Trimotor to Oshkosh and join up with everybody else who owns one. With good weather and a little luck, Glover believes there may be eight or nine Trimotors at AirVenture. After seeing the magic on the ramp at Mount Pleasant, I’m pretty sure the magician will make it happen.

Cover Photo

The Continental PBY *Catalina* is an enormous flying machine, dwarfing young mechanic Bryan Miklos. It served as armed reconnaissance, a patrol bomber and air-sea rescue primarily in the Pacific theater. This particular airframe is new addition to the Museum, and it towers over the Museum’s P-39.

About the Author

Cessna owner Mike Jones lives in central North Carolina and enjoys taking his Centurion to aviation museums. He has trouble driving across town to get a haircut — too boring, too much traffic! — but doesn't mind flying for hours to see a new museum. He's always accessible at PilotMike2012@gmail.com.

