

COMBAT AIR MUSEUM

→ → → Plane Talk → → →

The Official Newsletter of the Combat Air Museum

Forbes Field Topeka, Kansas

August / September 2009 • Vol. 25, No. 4

Escadrille americaine/ Lafayette Escadrille - Our speakers present an early chapter in America's participation in WW I.

Members **Dave Murray** and **Tad Pritchett** were our speakers for the June Membership Luncheon and gave a presentation on the *Lafayette Escadrille*. Dave and Tad have paired up several times in the past for presentations dealing with World War I events.

As an introduction Dave talked about Howard Hughes' epic World War I film *Hell's Angels* (1930). Hughes bought up a large number of old airplanes including World War I vintage types to film a story centered on combat pilots of the Great War. The movie deals primarily with two brothers in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) who are very different personalities. When one brother's courage comes under question, they both volunteer to fly a captured German bomber to bomb a German munitions plant. Dave said a real bomber was used in the film.

The movie was originally filmed as a silent film. While it was still in production *The Jazz Singer* was released in full sound (late 1927). Hughes responded by re-shooting *Hell's Angels* in sound, costing him about \$4 million dollars and delaying the film's release for some two and one-half years.

Dave then began speaking about Americans' involvement in World War I prior to the US entry into the war. He said that US citizens offered their services



Dave Murray talks about the Lafayette Escadrille.

to both the French and the British by joining organizations such as the Foreign Legion, ambulance services, **"Escadrille americaine," con't. on pg. 10**

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Combat Air Museum

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Museum Hours

January 2 - February 28/29
Mon. - Sun. Noon - 4:30 P.M.
Last Entry Every Day is 3:30 P.M.
March 1 - December 31
Mon. - Sat. 9 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.
Last Entry Every Day is 3:30 P.M.
Closed New Year's Day, Easter,
Thanksgiving, Christmas Day

Newsletter

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Plane Talk, the official newsletter
of Combat Air Museum
of Topeka, Kansas,
is published bi-monthly.
Your questions and comments
are welcomed.

In Memoriam

Mary Hunt

May 19, 2009

Topeka

Member # 3735

***August/September
Calendar of Events***

August

Monday – Thursday, August 3-6

Aviation Education Class
JWECC
9 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Monday, August 10

Membership Luncheon
Jean Wanner Education Conference Room
11:30 a.m.
Our guest speaker will be Russell Stark,
a CH-47 *Chinook*
helicopter pilot
based at Marshall Field, Fort Riley, Kansas.

September

Saturday, September 26

Winged Foot 5K Fun Run & Walk
J Street, by Hangar 602
8 a.m.

There is no Membership Luncheon
in September.



**Visit our website at
www.combatairmuseum.org**

Combat Air Museum and Topeka Shawnee County Public Library join forces on an exhibit in the Library's Sabatini Gallery

“*The First Twelve Seconds*” is the title of an exhibit set up at the Topeka Shawnee County Public Library (TSCPL) by CAM member **Dick Trupp** and **Sherry Best**, director of the Alice C. Sabatini Gallery of the TSCPL. The exhibit depicts the Wright Brothers historic flight of December 17, 1903; the first manned, controlled, powered flight of an aircraft.

The exhibit includes a 1/15 scale model of the Wright *Flyer* built by CAM member **Larry Todd** of Gardner, Kansas. A large photo of the first flight is in the exhibit as are several large posters showing details and cutaways of the *Flyer* and a history of Orville and Wilbur Wright, their work on the *Flyer*, and other inventions. Other signage in the exhibit round out the historical context. Dick said there are subtle items in the exhibit that add to its educational value. The exhibit opened June 15 and will run through at least August 3.

This is the first time CAM has partnered with Topeka Shawnee County Public Library in creating an exhibit. We hope it will be the first of several future exhibits that not only serve the library but promote Combat Air Museum. It may open the door for us to appear in other venues in Topeka.



The exhibit will run through at least August 3.



The “*First Twelve Seconds*” exhibit at the Topeka Shawnee County Public Library. (Left) Signage in the Library exhibit. – photos by Dave Murray

We say good-bye and best wishes to volunteer Tom Witty

July 8, 2009, was **Tom Witty's** last day doing volunteer work at Combat Air Museum. He and **Mary Anne**, his wife, departed Topeka two days later for a new home in Lincoln, Nebraska to be closer to their son, David, and his family. Tom and Mary Anne lived in Topeka for 40 years.

Tom is a 16-year member of the Museum and volunteered in the past as a judge at CAM's model contests. He became our primary exhibit builder in 2002. In May of that year, we completed the conversion of two large, former storage spaces in Hangar 602 into exhibit rooms and a library. The two L-shaped rooms gave us 725 square feet of new exhibit space, and Tom began working to fill it up. Six years later, the rooms were filled, mostly with Tom's work. Some 21 exhibits are in the rooms, and Tom put 16 of them there. The photos, artwork, and large Air Force emblems hanging on the walls are his work, too.

With the exhibit rooms virtually filled, Tom worked on exhibits in the rear of the Gift Shop, exhibits in the Education Conference Room, and exhibits in both hangar bays. His work totals over 30 exhibits. He also helped the curator hang over 50 pieces of artwork in the Art Gallery. Tom's exhibits vary widely in size. The smallest were those we called "typewriter" exhibits. The exhibit cases were actually built and used to display Olivetti office equipment. There were only a handful of these. The rest were much more substantial. The largest cases were twenty feet long, ranging from five and one-half to seven feet high, and from fifteen inches to four feet deep. Tom did three of these.

The process from beginning to end of Tom constructing an exhibit was quite educational. It went something like this. Tom started with establishing the exhibit's theme and then gathering the research material and artifacts to support the theme. Things occasionally changed along the way and sometimes more than one story developed within an exhibit. For some exhibits Tom built models that went into them. He built nine aircraft models for the Inter-War Years exhibit, but the



Tom Witty with a plaque recognizing his volunteer service with Combat Air Museum.

most impressive model building occurred with the Midway exhibit. Tom built seven 1/700 scale aircraft carriers, all in accurate markings. He also assembled the landing gear and propellers to all 234 aircraft for the carriers and painted them.

Once Tom had an idea of the artifacts and items he would use in an exhibit he sketched the layout on legal paper. When the sketch was complete, and he had a good feel for how he may arrange the exhibit, he started work on the case. Tom modified case interiors with additional panels and painted them. He wanted an aesthetic effect that would compliment the artifacts and also draw a visitor to the exhibit.

With the case work complete Tom took measurements of the side and bottom panels and made full size cutouts from paper for each panel. He hung these in the library – his workshop – and began taping photos, text, and cutout shapes of artifacts to the panels. He made all the major changes to an exhibit with the paper panels before anything actually went into a case. The exhibit titles were usually next. Tom used ceramic letters and stick-on letters to create these, always using a ruler and level to mount them in the exhibit case.

Correction to the "Pancake Feed" article in the June/July issue

In our last issue, it was reported that the pancake feed grossed \$5,359 with a net \$3,910. The numbers should have been a gross of \$6,414 and net of \$4,465. This is what happens when the curator tries to cipher all the numbers instead of asking the treasurer. ➔

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Your membership and
support are
important to us.

The next step was transferring items from the library into the case, and he often still used paper cutouts with this preliminary move. That way, he could still make adjustments to the setup of items in the exhibit. When the time came, he then began cutting the final photocopies and signage and gluing these to backing material. They were then mounted in the case. Shelves and/or stands were installed where needed, and then the artifacts and models, if used, started going into the exhibit. Because of his prior preparation, once things started going into a case, the exhibit developed relatively quickly until we had a new exhibit ready for show.

Putting a few hundred man-hours into one exhibit was not uncommon at all for Tom, and the payoff is quite evident in the quality of exhibits he has built. Needless to say, we are going to miss Tom's talents. And we are certainly going to miss his friendship and presence in this museum. We wish Tom and Mary Anne the best in their new venture, and always.

➔ ➔ ➔

New Supporters

Dylan Allen
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Renewing Supporters

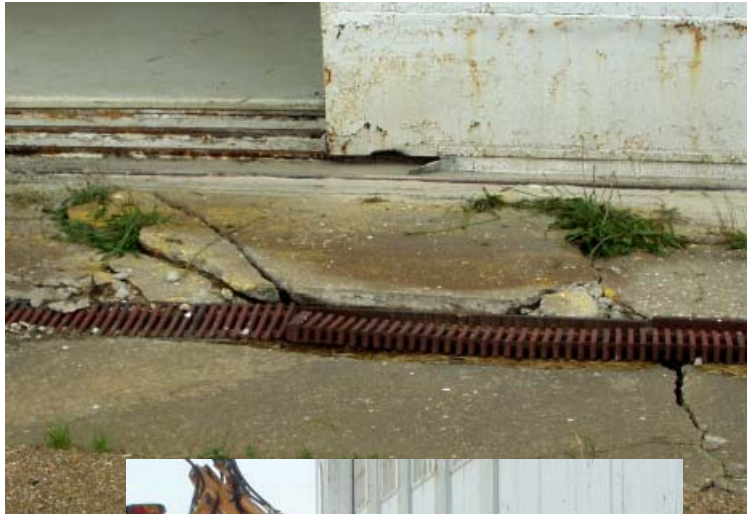
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Chelsea Mann
Gil Marick & Gretchen Hanson
Don & Becky Mathers
Larry Morgan
Richard Novak
Richard Olsen
Gerry Sibley
Dick & Jeanne Trupp
Robert & Marjorie Van Camp
John & Debbie Winter

➔ ➔ ➔

We move ahead with a number of projects this summer at the Museum

Hangar 602 Apron and Drain Repairs

Work to rebuild the apron area and drainage in front of Hangar 602 began June 10 and is ongoing. We currently have a hole 124 feet long by 17 feet wide by about 1 foot deep immediately in front of the hangar. The existing concrete and drain in this area are gone. On July 7 the side walls for a new trench drain were poured. Ten new drain lines have yet to be run from the hangar door drains to the trench drain. Additional repair work to rotten concrete by the hangar doors also has to be done, as well as repairs to some other concrete areas damaged by the contractor. When these are all complete an eight-inch pour of new concrete in the large hole surrounding the new trench drain will be made. A run of 12-inch reinforced concrete pipe that attaches to the north end of the trench drain has already been laid and buried with earth.



(Top) A section of existing concrete
 (Above) Concrete at the center front of the hangar was 15 to 18 inches thick.
 (Left) The new trench storm drain.

BT-13

Dave Houser is just about done painting the fuselage of this aircraft.

Link Trainer

The Link Trainer Dave worked on through last winter is out of the workshop and sitting by the BT-13. After the trainer was moved from inside the shop, the right wing and top hood were installed. The location by the BT-13 is good as both trainers have the same paint scheme. We plan to get a light installed in the trainer so visitors looking through the clear plastic panels on the right side of the trainer fuselage can better see the interior and instruments.



Link and BT-13: The 1941 Link Trainer beside the 1941 BT-13 Valiant.

APU

On June 16 **Mr. Tom Dailey** of Wheat Ridge, Colorado donated an Auxiliary Power Unit (APU) to CAM. The unit is complete and had been run in the past. It was manufactured by Homelite in 1944. This specific type of unit was used to provide internal, auxiliary power in B-17, B-24, and PB4Y-2 aircraft during World War II. Mr. Dailey said they were also used by beach masters on invasion beaches to power loudspeakers and lights.

Don has cleaned the APU and done corrosion control on some areas. Otherwise we will preserve the unit as is. Don is currently building a stand for the APU.

ORISKANY Model

Dick Trupp recently completed some work on the original flight deck of the ORISKANY model, painting it and applied markings provided by **Ted Nolde**. This deck will act as a temporary display base for the

model aircraft **Darren Roberts** is building for the model carrier. Darren recently brought over a completed A-3 Skywarrior and picked up a box of other aircraft models to build for the exhibit. When done, he will have built 49 aircraft of five types for the ORISKANY. He said all the models will take over 1,000 decals for markings.

Darren also brought in one model for the World War II exhibit and three for the Vietnam War exhibit.

F-86H

Robert Johnston and **Danny San Romani** stripped the remaining paint from the bottom of the aircraft's forward fuselage and wings. **Air Force Jr. ROTC cadets from Highland Park High School** spent one morning opening and removing forward fuselage panels to clean these areas, some of which had birds' nests, droppings and dirt in them. The cadets removed some of the materials by hand, then used a shop vacuum. Then some of them took turns using a power washer for cleaning out the areas and backsides of the panels.

"Projects," con't. on page 8

"Projects," con't. from page 7

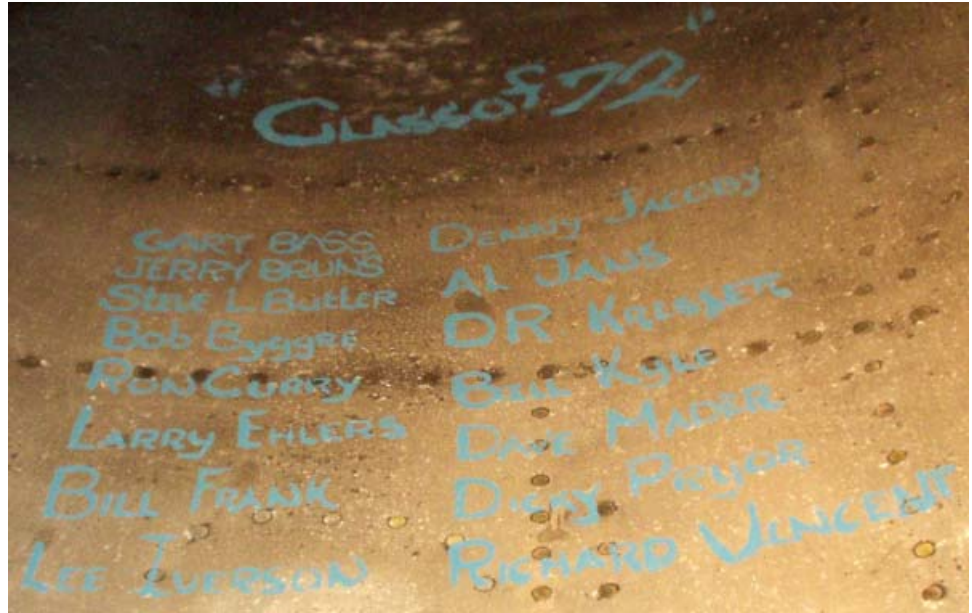
Don Dawson manufactured a fitting for the F-86 on the shop lathe. Its full name is longeron fitting barrel stud. It is a large fitting threaded on both ends. Four of these studs are mounted in the forward fuselage where the jet comes apart to change out the engine. The cap nuts for the fittings are in the rear fuselage. When attached, these are the four attachments that hold the two fuselage sections together. We were missing one of the studs, and Don made the replacement.

Robert and Danny removed the gun blast panels from the plane and Robert ground their edges in areas in order to get a proper fit on the jet. They also worked with the canopy to get it moved forward into its proper, closed position. Robert then crawled into the engine air intake to look it over as he will eventually paint this. About eleven feet into the fuselage he found "Class of 1972" and a list of 15 names painted in blue on the intake skin. This was the **Hawkeye Institute of Technology** (Waterloo, Iowa) 1972 graduating class of Airframe and Powerplant mechanics. CAM acquired the F-86H from Hawkeye Institute in 1985.

Robert has since contacted at least one of those 1972 graduates and acquired some yearbook photos of the listed students from Hawkeye Community College. We will leave this area undisturbed when we paint the F-86.

Ambulance

Don Dawson has added a couple of more items to our 1941 Dodge Ambulance. We had two assemblies for mounting five gallon gas cans to the ambulance's



(Above) List of 1972 Hawkeye Institute of Technology Airframe & Powerplant graduates found inside the F-86H Sabre.

(Page 9) The 1941 Dodge ambulance now has gas cans on its front fenders.

fenders. Don researched what we needed to mount the assemblies and ordered the parts. We had a handful of five gallon military gas cans, and he picked two of these to clean and repaint. Don also painted the assemblies and mounted them, one on each front fender. He then installed the cans to the assemblies.

ROTC Cadets

Cadets from the Highland Park High School Air Force Jr. ROTC have spent six Thursday mornings working with curator Danny San Romani. **Major Peter Kind** or **Master Sergeant Robert Thadison** have brought the cadets out. So far this summer they have washed the F-105 Thunderchief, F-101 Voodoo, F3D Skyknight, SNB-5, T-33, and TA-4J Skyhawk. They cleaned compartment and panels on the F-86 Sabre, and most recently painted several wall panels in Hangar 604 and applied a coat of primer on the cradle for the Shenyang F-8II fuselage.





August Membership Luncheon Speaker

Our scheduled speaker for the August Membership Luncheon, Monday August 10, is **Russell Stark**. He is a US Army CH-47 *Chinook* pilot based out of Marshall Field, Fort Riley, Kansas. He will talk about his duties in Egypt training Egyptians to operate and fly the *Chinook*. He will also talk about his time served in Honduras. →

Visitors

During **May** the Museum had **1,381 visitors** from **34** states, Puerto Rico and Australia Canada Germany Netherlands

During **June** we had **1,402 visitors** from 35 states, Washington, D.C. and Australia Bolivia Canada China Finland Great Britain Italy

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2009 Events Calendar

Event dates subject to change

August

3-6 Aviation Education Class

September

26 *Winged Foot* 5K Fun Run/Walk

→ → →

Join the Combat Air Museum!

Your membership and support are important to us.



Tad Pritchett (left)
and Dave Murray
setting up their
presentation.

"Escadrille americaine," con't. from page 1

the French Air Service (*Aeronautique Militaire*), or the RFC. Enough Americans volunteered to the French Air Service that the *Escadrille americaine* was formed in April 1916 and later, the Lafayette Flying Corps.

In February 1916 the Germans launched the Verdun (France) offensive about 140 miles east/north-east of Paris with the objective of bleeding the French Army dry. The 10-month campaign, fought mostly over a 10 square mile area, cost the combatants two million casualties. To help take pressure off the French army at Verdun, and also to help relieve pressure in Russia, Allies launched the Battle of the Somme (France) in July 1916 about 75 miles north of Paris. The *Escadrille americaine* saw its first combat during the Verdun campaign.

Dave then spoke about the US citizens and neutrality laws. As early as August 1914, the United States vowed to maintain a strict neutrality in regard to the general war in Europe. Americans had to apply to go overseas in compliance with neutrality policy, and requests for entry were granted on an individual basis. American volunteers assigned to the French Air Service were initially assigned to bomber units flying the Voisin, a primitive bomber.

Dave said five men formed the *Escadrille americaine/Lafayette Escadrille*. They were Doctor Edmund Gros, Norman Prince, Frazier Curtis, Victor Chapman, and William Thaw. Gros was the chief surgeon of the American Ambulance Corps. He had connections in high society and brought pressure to bear to

form an American volunteer air unit. Prince was the son of a wealthy financier and practiced law. He joined a group in 1912 to build and race a plane. Curtis was a friend of Prince. He entered the French Air Service in March 1915 but was injured and discharged. Chapman enlisted in the French Foreign Legion and transferred into the French Air Service in August 1915 where he flew bombers. Thaw also initially joined the French Foreign Legion. He was from a wealthy Pittsburgh family. He began flying as an observer in December 1914 and in the autumn and winter of 1915 worked with Prince to form the *Escadrille americaine*.

French Captain George Thenault commanded the *Escadrille americaine/Lafayette Escadrille*. Four other French officers served in the unit at various times, including French ace Charles Nungesser (third highest French combat ace). Thirty-eight US volunteers were in the squadron. Twenty-three of them were from the east, including nine from New York. Only two volunteers were from the west. The unit flew Nieuport 17 biplane fighters and was designated squadron N-124 of the French Air Service. The squadron insignia was an American Indian Chief's head in profile. Not long after the squadron formed, it joined the Verdun campaign. Germany complained the *Escadrille americaine* was an American flying unit fighting for France in violation of US neutrality. This led to the squadron being renamed *Lafayette Escadrille*. Dave said there were 170 other American volunteers spread throughout the Lafayette Flying Corps – a unit separate from the *Escadrille*.

Victor Chapman was killed over Verdun on June 25, 1916. Robert Lockwell was killed in action September 23, 1916. Norman Prince was wounded in action and later died of these wounds on October 12, 1916. James McConnell was killed in action March 19, 1917, and was the last US airman killed before the United States entered the war.

Tad then joined the presentation. He showed a slide of *Basic Flying Instructions* from the World War I era, followed by a slide with specifications for the Nieuport 17. Tad said the *Lafayette Escadrille* originally flew Nieuport 11s, but very soon after transitioned into the Nieuport 17, a better airplane.

He then showed a slide of the *Philosophy and Tactics of Aerial Combat 1917*. These told how and what a pilot should be. The document contained several pages and included basic piloting advice. Tad said the original *Escadrille americaine* pilots arrived between April 18, 1916 and June 4, 1916. The squadron Commanding Officer and Executive Officer were French. In September 1916 the unit adopted two lion cubs as mascots, naming them Soda and Whiskey. Tad said the pair ended up in Paris zoos and Soda died in 1919 due to over exposure to winter weather.

The *Lafayette Escadrille* was in operation 22 months until its decommissioning. Tad showed a slide of a map of the Western Front with five areas of operation marked by rings where the squadron flew and fought. In late 1917 the *Escadrille* and Lafayette Flying Corps were to be phased out and their pilots transferred to the US Air Service. The *Lafayette Escadrille* was dropped from the Order of Battle on February 18, 1918. A total of 43 pilots served in the squadron. Twenty pilots shot down 39 enemy aircraft and these same twenty went on to shoot down 67 more enemy planes. Raoul Lufberry, an original *Lafayette Escadrille* member, later commanded the 94th Aero Squadron. He was killed in action May 19, 1918, and was one of America's most noted aces. Frenchman Charles Nungesser downed 44 enemy planes with French squadron N-65.

Of other *Lafayette Escadrille* volunteers, twelve were accepted as US Air Service fliers. Nine went to the US Navy. Three were accepted as non-fliers. Nine had

been killed, and five others wounded, hospitalized, and released from duty. Four stayed with the French Air Service. One became a prisoner of war.

Tad spoke a little about the French Foreign Legion and said five *Lafayette Escadrille* members served in the Legion and fought in the area around Reims (France), about 80 miles northeast of Paris. The French suffered some 200,000 casualties on that front.

Behonne Airfield near Bar-le-Duc, France was one of the *Escadrille*'s fields during the Verdun campaign. They earlier flew out of Luxeuil, France, where the unit was formed. Tad said the squadron flew escort for an RAF bombing mission to Oberndorf, Germany on October 12, 1916, to attack a Mauser arms factory. The raid launched from Luxeuil. The round trip was some 220

miles, and the raiding aircraft returned to Luxeuil in fading daylight.

Moving around the Western Front as needed, the *Escadrille* flew in the Somme sector from October 1916 until January 1917. In

August 1917 it took part in an air strike against German forces in the Argonne north of Verdun prior to the launch of a large Allied ground attack. Tad said that in flying support of the ground forces, observation balloons were high priority targets. They were also dangerous targets because of all the anti-aircraft arms set up around them.

The 2006 cinema release *Flyboys* was briefly discussed. This is a fictional account of the *Lafayette Escadrille*/Lafayette Flying Corps. An African-American pilot is among the American volunteers in the movie. This character was based loosely on Eugene Bullard, the first African-American military pilot. Bullard flew with the French Air Service during World War I, but not with the *Escadrille*.

As with the *Flying Tigers* in China and the Royal Air Force *Eagle* squadron in England prior to America's entry into World War II, the *Escadrille americaine*/*Lafayette Escadrille* of World War I is a very interesting part of US military aviation history. We thank Dave and Tad for sharing some of its history with us. Perhaps their presentation tweaked some of our interests to do further reading and study of these early American fighter pilots. →

Enough Americans volunteered to the French Air Service that the *Escadrille americaine* was formed in April 1916.

Join us as a volunteer or a runner at our Winged Foot Fun Run/Walk

The last Saturday of September, September 26, is the date for the fifth annual Winged Foot 5K Fun Run/Walk. Registration opens at 6:45 a.m. and the race begins at 8 a.m. Judy Coder, professional western singer, educator, and part-time runner is our honorary co-sponsor for this year's event.

The registration fee is \$20 before the day of the race, and \$22 on race day. Registration forms are available on the Museum's website, www.combatairmuseum.org. Go to www.combatairmuseum.org/navigation.html. Select the Winged Foot 5K Run button to download the blank registration form. Forms are also available at the Museum.

The racecourse is on Forbes Field and starts and ends on J Street immediately west of the Museum. The 5K racecourse was certified in 2008 by the Road Running Technical Council of USA Track and Field.

Members can help support this event in various ways. Sponsorships are very important. Please solicit sponsors from businesses or individuals, and/or become a sponsor yourselves. A sponsorship is \$100 and all sponsors will be listed on the back of the race T-shirt. Sponsor information and a sign-up form are available at

our website at the address listed above for race forms. Again, sponsor forms will also be available at the Museum.

The Fun Run is the last fund raiser of the year for the Museum, and the monies raised by the event are important for the winter months when attendance is down and heating bills go up.

We need volunteers to run the event. The various areas where help is needed include the registration tent, on the racecourse as monitors/course marshals, and to pass out water to the runners and walkers. We need a team of people at the finish line to ensure the finishers are properly recorded. The finish line team will need four or five people. Volunteers for the registration tent need to be at CAM by 6:30 a.m. Other volunteers need to be at the Museum no later than 7:30 a.m.

Certainly another way members can support the 5K event is to become a participant as either a runner or walker. Several of you have done this in the past, and some of you hold age group records.

Please plan now to help with the Winged Foot Fun Run/Walk. Come out and be a part of this fall event for the benefit of Combat Air Museum. ➔