Shuttle Inspiration— Finding ways to inspire younger generations

Downey was awarded a $3 million federal loan to build a permanent center for its original, full-size space shuttle mock-up, officials said this week. Built in 1972 by Rockwell International, the shuttle is currently housed under a temporary tent in a parking lot at the former Downey Studios, 12214 Lakewood Blvd. The low-interest Department of Housing and Urban Development loan will help pay for the new Inspiration Neighborhood Center, a 18,500-square-foot multipurpose community center that will house the shuttle, along with meeting and office space. “The facility will be a welcome addition for the lower income neighborhood of south Downey,” said Brian Saeki, community development director for the City of Downey. "This loan will provide a facility - not only to learn about space and the things we have to offer here in Downey - but also access to a facility with some special programming for that specific neighborhood," he said. "It's not just a place to have the shuttle mock-up. It's going to be much more than that." Construction could begin as early as mid-summer and be completed by the first quarter of 2014, Saeki said.

"We are very happy and excited," he said. "We can now begin really focusing on getting the construction documents completed and getting the building built." HUD Regional Administrator Ophelia Basgal said in a statement that she hopes the loan will be a boost to the City’s revitalization efforts and provide jobs for residents.
The title of this article paraphrases a famous quote that was designed as a typing exercise by Charles E. Weller in 1867. But it has another, more important, meaning here. The Aerospace Legacy Foundation (ALF) is in serious need of some help from its active members.

ALF was founded in 1994 and its mission has been, and is, to preserve the historical Aerospace sites in California. Its activities include gathering documents, photos, film and graphics documenting California’s Aerospace history. The organization also promotes collaboration and partnership with other Aerospace industry and museum stakeholders. ALF is a source of aerospace history for educators, students and the general public and invites and encourages retired aerospace workers to participate in its mission.

ALF was very active in promoting the construction of the Columbia Memorial Space Center and the preservation of a significant portion (Bldg. 1 annex) of the Downey Rockwell/Boeing site as a historical aerospace landmark when the Tierra Luna Marketplace redevelopment was initiated.

The Aerospace Legacy Foundation reaches out to the community by providing speakers to schools, industry and civic organizations to present various aspects of aerospace history or current events. ALF also actively participates in AIAA symposiums and panel discussions.

ALF is very active in the Downey community and is a long time member of the Downey Chamber of Commerce and the Downey Coordinating Council. We have formed partnerships with other non-profit groups to enhance Downey’s efforts in preserving and sharing the city’s long and prestigious aerospace history. Since 1995 the ALF has made over 200 presentations to educate the public about our nations’ incredible aerospace heritage, particularly at Downey’s former NASA site.

In order to continue its mission the ALF must rely on its members for support. In recent months our leadership has been hampered by illnesses and work-related difficulties. We find ourselves in need of active support from our members. We greatly value your monetary contributions and annual dues, but we find ourselves in need of additional “hands-on” help. At the last General Membership Meeting on May 18, our president, Jerry Blackburn, outlined the committees that need individuals to take on tasks that will allow us to continue our leadership in the preservation of our aerospace history. Here are the committees and their goals:

- **Fundraising** – Identify and planning fundraising activities for ALF.
- **Membership** – Volunteer to improve ALF membership.
- **Programs & Projects** – Programs and Projects Committee for events and preservation efforts.

We recommend that the chairman of each committee set aside one afternoon every two months to report on its activities at our scheduled Board of Directors meeting at the Downey ALF office.

Please call the ALF Downey office at **562-922-8068** or send an e-mail to our President Jerry Blackburn at **blackbga@yahoo.com** if you are interested in participating in one, or more, of the committees.

ALF survives strictly on participation of its volunteer members and we hope you can offer a few hours of your time to help continue its legacy preservation mission.

**ALF Meeting Schedule**

- **July 17** Special Board meeting @ 4:00 pm at ALF Office
- **August 21** Regular Board meeting @ 4:00 pm at ALF Office
- **September 21** General Membership meeting @ 1:30 pm at Columbia Space Center
- **October 16** Regular Board of Directors meeting @ 4:00 pm at ALF Office
- **November 16** General Membership meeting @ 1:30 pm at Columbia Space Center
- **December 18** Regular Board of Directors meeting @ 4:00 pm at ALF Office
- **January 18 2014** General Membership meeting @ 1:30 pm at Columbia Space Center
Living at the plant in the early 1930’s

By Helen Heath McMurray

Please keep in mind I had only reached the tender age of 5 years when we moved to Downey from Los Angeles in 1929. Our family consisted of father, Earle G. Heath, bookkeeper for Emsco; mother Florence and two children, Gordon, 6 years, and myself, Helen. Keeping this date in mind, any inaccuracies should be understood.

Emsco (E.M. Smith Company) was located in South gate until hard times rapidly came upon us necessitating Emsco to move to the present Rockwell building (Downey Studios—Ed.) which was very small at this time as the picture indicates. They needed a caretaker and my father needed an income so they closed the café (above) next door to the main building and our family moved in. The front half of the building was the café with large table stacked around. We used this for our sleeping quarters. The back half was a small room we called our living room and bathroom. Down the hall were two more rest rooms for the café. The kitchen was a large room. The cupboards didn’t have doors on them (just curtains). The sinks were too large, deep aluminum monsters. I thought I would never be tall enough to comfortably reach into those sinks to do the dishes and touch the bottom.

Sometimes it was scary living at the plant—like when the police came in to search for prowlers. An open window was found but no one was there and nothing was stolen. Also fright came my way the day I went into the front part of our house and found a man looking around. He had seen the “café” sign on the front of the building. He was hungry and very angry so my mother made a sandwich, cookies & milk for him and sent him on his way— a happy man! We had tighter security after all this.

At the time of earthquake in 1933 (Long Beach Earthquake) we had just finished dinner. My brother was reading a book while my mother & father were preparing to lock things up at the plant. When the quake hit Gordon, my brother, glanced up and saw the furniture coming away from the wall. Although he was sitting next to the front door he carefully laid his book face down so not to lose his place, got up, pushed the furniture back into place and went through the house checking everything as he went and exited the back door where my parents were frantically calling for him. Everyone was safe. The ceiling was severely cracked in the sleeping area—chunks of plaster had fallen on the beds. We had so many severe aftershocks all night that several families gathered in one newer home that wasn’t damaged & sat up most of the night.

During the years we spent at the plant occasionally airplane would land. One day my father received call that Wiley Post would be landing there in a little while. He was coming from Long Beach. So we were waiting near the hangar when he arrived in his “Winnie Mae”. After visiting with him for a while and sitting inside his plane he invited us to go for a short flight with him. They had a little difficulty starting the plane (a prop job) so I refused to ride knowing for sure that the plane would crash as soon as it gained its maximum altitude. My childish knowledge was of course, wrong and I missed a great experience.

When the nation’s economy began its rebound we knew another change was coming into our lives. As new contracts were signed for the manufacture of airplanes we had to seek other living quarters so we moved into the heart of Downey and the airplane industry took off.

I do hope you can find parts of this useful. Dates, names etc. are very difficult to come by—considering my age. Wish I could be of greater assistance. Good luck.

Helen McMurray 10-28-1991

Letter to Bob Thompson, Downey historical Society

Editor note—Thank you Bob for sharing these wonderful articles from Helen and Gordon Heath.
The front part of this building (above) is on Lakewood Boulevard today.

Top photo: Bert Kinner, left, speaks with a man at Downey Field, 1933. E.M. Smith had built this building in 1929. Smith, leased out the property in 1933 to Security Aircraft. Photos lower left: Downey, CA, 1933. Kinner’s “low wing monoplane” and factory at Security National Aircraft Corporation, Downey, California. Security Airster with Bert Kinner (right) greets Mr. Van Matre and Mr. Lund.

Security National Aircraft Corporation leased the former Emsco plant after Champion Aircraft faltered because of poor economic conditions. Champion Aircraft had leased the plant in February of 1932. Security Aircraft was owned by Walter "Bert" Kinner. An innovative, experienced pilot, he had moved his Kinner Airplane and Motor Corporation from Glendale. Builder of the ‘Kinner’ motor, Kinner designed and manufactured two airplanes for Amelia Earhart and had dreams of developing a small plane market that would rival what the automobile market had done for Henry Ford. He patented the "folding wing" design, and, in 1933, flew the new folding wing design at the National Air Races in Los Angeles. The plane was called the "Security Airster" and sold for about $1985.00.

At the end of 1933 Bert Kinner moved his operations to the Van Nuys Airport. The Downey plant was then sold to Baker Oil Tools Company. It is believed that Baker Oil tools used the buildings for storage. Vultee Aircraft took over in 1936.
Presidents Message- By Jerry Blackburn

We have reached the halfway point for 2013. It seems like we were just starting this New Year last month. Where does the time go? There are three things I would like to share with you in this newsletter.

First, and most obvious, is what is happening at the Downey site. If you haven’t been by it lately you will probably not recognize it. The primary Downey Studios site has been cleared except for the original Buildings on Lakewood Boulevard, the Kaufmann Wing. The new developer, Alberta Development, has begun the search for tenants and will be on the site beginning in July to guide the development process.

Second, The Aerospace Legacy Foundation organization has reached a critical point of reassessing its vision and mission. We have been very successful over the past 20 years. Our accomplishments have made the public aware of who we are and what we stand for. Our network and reputation has gone beyond southern California and has a national connection. It is therefore timely that we re-evaluate those accomplishments and consider the new directions and needs for the organization. I have asked our Board of Directors to participate in strategic review of ALF’s Vision and Mission. We would also appreciate hearing from you. Please share any thoughts you may have.

Visit us at Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/ALFDowney/

Third, As we look to a new and re-invigorated organization we need to engage fresh new ideas and energy. I would like to ask for your help by joining one of the new committees that have been formed to take on these new tasks. The volunteer Article in this edition will show how you can get involved and make a difference in ALF. Thanks for your continued support. Jerry.

“Downey’s Oldest Resident” (9-16-1953) Downey Livewire

Article excerpt from the Downey Livewire, Thursday, September 17, 1953.

“Miss Judy McKellar, who will celebrate her 98th birthday in November, helps North American Aviation celebrate its 25th birthday in a visit to the company’s Downey plant. With Miss McKellar was Mrs. K.C. Weiss, of the Downey Livewire, and Bert Prestwich, Foreman of the North American T-28 trainer Final Assembly and Flight Test Operations. The company’s modern Air Force T-28 trainer is in the background. As a special honor to Miss McKellar, Bert Prestwich attached a lapel pin of the company’s blazing fast F-86 Sabre to her dress.” Miss Judy came with her family to Downey in the 1870’s and pioneered Gallatin Settlement, which is northwest Downey today. She lived to be 105. Miss Judy witnessed Downey’s history for 10 decades “from orange trees to space”.

Gordon Madru will be deeply missed by all

“Gordon Elmer Madru, 80, passed away, June 15, after 6 years battle with Parkinson's and other complications. He was born at Mission Hospital, Huntington Park on August 17, 1932, to Elmer and Ethel Madru. Gordon graduated from Huntington Park High School in 1950. After serving in the military, Gordon settled in Downey and went to work for Mobil Oil Corporation where he worked for 32 years beginning as a mechanic and retiring as an accountant. He was active in Indian Guides, Boy Scouts, CBMC, Aerospace Legacy Foundation, Downey Historical Society and First Baptist Church of Downey. Gordon enjoyed traveling, working on cars, helping others and spending time with his family.” (Downey Patriot) He is survived by his wife Marilyn of 60 years and family. Gordon and Marilyn are Lifetime members of ALF and were instrumental in arranging our meeting place at the Baptist Church for many years. They were recipients of ALF’s Lifetime Achievement Award. We will miss you Gordie!
Congratulations to those near and dear!

Congratulations to longtime ALF Director and benefactor, Dr. Mary Stauffer (left), who was honored on Thursday, June 27th by the Downey Chamber of Commerce with the Don & Julie Knabbe Humanitarian of the Year Award.

Congratulations to ALF Director Mr. Bob Sechrist (left) for being honored recently by the Downey Coordinating Council’s “Volunteer of the Year” for the Aerospace Legacy Foundation. “More than two dozen Downey civic leaders were honored by the Downey Coordinating Council on Thursday at its 59th annual Community Volunteer Service Awards. Honorees will be honored for their service to their respective organizations and the community as a whole.” Bob has been a longtime ALF Director and former employee of North American Aviation, Rockwell and Boeing. His dedication to ALF is evident in his selfless acts of “hard work” when we need him most, Bob Sechrist is there for us!

Congratulations also to former ALF Director Bob Thompson (center left) for his recent election to be President of the Downey Historical Society. Bob, a former Rockwell/Boeing employee, is a lifetime member of ALF and has long been a Director at the Downey History Center. Mr. Thompson’s knowledge and recollection of Downey’s fascinating history will help him lead the Historical Society into the future. He is looking forward to bringing younger people in to visit the Downey History Center. We have been fortunate at ALF to have Bob as a member, director and local historian. The Downey Historical Society has some big shoes to fill with Mr. John Vincent (right) retiring after over two decades at the helm. Our best regards and congratulations to John Vincent for the fantastic job he has done leading the Downey Historical Society into 2013. John is also a talented poet.

News from Jim Busby:

We are happy to hear from Jim Busby and he is doing much better after an extended health issue. Jim expects to be home soon and get back to a routine and his hobbies. He’d like to thank everyone for their thoughts, prayers and support in this difficult period. Ad Astra!