COUNTY OF GLENN
BOARD REPORT

PUBLIC WORKS - WILLOWS AIRPORT AIR TANKER MONUMENT STATUS UPDATE
Submitted by Public Works
May 19, 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
Work continues on the memorial. Staff seeks direction from the Board.

RECOMMENDATION(S):
Receive update from staff, consider and take possible action on acquisition of historic propellor for addition to the memorial; and relocating memorial nearer County Road G for greater public access.

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND:
Joe Ely was a Fire Management Officer with the Mendocino National Forest in the 1950’s. Mr. Ely was responsible for the practical use of agricultural aircraft in delivering fire retardant to wildfires that started the present day air tanker program utilized throughout the world.

In 1980, a plaque was erected and dedicated at the Willows-Glenn County Airport, commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the first air tanker retardant drop. The plaque includes likenesses of the figures who helped implement this new firefighting technique, and includes the following text:

The first operational air tanker was developed in Willows, by the Willows Flying Service in 1955, at the request of the Fire Control Officer for the Mendocino National Forest. A Boeing Stearman 75 ‘Caydet’ Agricultural Aircraft was modified with a 170 gallon tank at the Willows Airport. This aircraft, N75081, became the first registered free fall air tanker in the history of aviation. The first ‘air drop’ was made on the Mendenhall Fire, August 12, 1955, on the Mendocino National Forest.

In 1956, seven agricultural aircraft were modified and formed the first operation air tanker squadron in the United States. Piloted by local aviators, this squadron operated out of the Willows Airport fighting wildfires throughout California.

In 1959, heavy air tankers, capable of carrying 2,000 gallons of fire retardant were providing an effective tool in controlling wildfires. Aircraft having a retardant capacity of 3,000 gallons have contributed to successful wildfire control throughout the United States.
On April 4, 2006, the Board adopted Resolution 2006-27 "To Establish and Accept Donations to the Joe Ely Memorial Fund" to be used for relocation and maintenance of the 25th Anniversary Air Tanker Plaque and monument located at the Airport.

In accordance with Resolution 2006-27, Public Works staff relocated the 25th Anniversary Air Tanker Plaque and monument located at the Willows-Glenn County Airport. In November 2019, Public Works and Facilities staff worked together to refurbish and relocate the monument approximately 200 feet from its original location. Prior to relocation the monument was only visible by airport users, whereas it now resides adjacent to the parking lot of Nancy’s Airport Café and is available to be seen by the general public. Facilities staff salvaged the brick from the original monument in order to reuse as a decorative feature of the newly refreshed monument; see attached photos.

**FISCAL/PERSONNEL IMPACTS(S):**

On July 1, 2017, Planning and Public Works Agency staff transferred $1,017.55 from the Joe Ely Memorial Fund to the Willows Airport Enterprise Fund.

The cost of the maintenance and relocation totaled $3,086.85, with the following breakdown:

- Facilities labor: $2,296.40 (clean plaque, construct fence, install monument)
- Roads labor: $177.17 (augured holes for monument and fence install)
- Materials: $613.28 (Ponci’s Welding, fence materials)

**ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION:**

See above.

_Agenda Item and Backup_

Resolution 2006-27

WAP Tanker Plaque - Before A

WAP Tanker Plaque - After A