

# Watsonville Fly-In gets off ground for the 26th time

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This weekend's West Coast Antique Fly-In and Air Show at the Watsonville Airport will offer the public an opportunity to get off the ground and catch a bird's-eye view of the area.

It is the first time the event has offered the opportunity to take a ride in airplanes or helicopters, Fly-In organizers said. The Fly-In, sponsored by the Northern California Antique Airplane Association, has been held every Memorial Day weekend for the last 26 years.

Gene Cox, one of the organizers, said Fly-In visitors will be able to ride in a restored DC-3, the first of the commercial airliners built in the 1930s. The twin-engine plane holds 25 passengers.

Cox said rides on the DC-3, for \$50 a person, will be offered Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to about noon.

Helicopter rides, at an as-yet-undetermined price, will also be offered at about the same time. A MediVac helicopter will be there to give short rides and demonstrate how injured people are taken to the hospital.

The whole idea is give the public an appreciation of aircraft and to preserve aviation history, said NCAAA president Gayle Womack, chairman of this year's Fly-In organizing committee.

Womack said she expects about 300 planes and 2,500 people. Womack said organizers hope to make a profit of \$20,000. That money will be put toward an antique airplane museum at the South (Santa Clara) County Airport in San Martin.

This is the first year the Fly-In has been sponsored solely by the NCAAA. In the past, the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce has co-sponsored the event. Womack said disputes between the two groups led to the chamber's pulling its support of the event. Dave Kegebein, who had been the chamber's representative for the last five Fly-Ins, said money was at the center of the dispute.

He said net profits had always been divided evenly between the NCAAA and the chamber, but not the amount of work that went into putting the event together. Kegebein said people from the chamber did about 80 percent of the work, but ended

up with only 50 percent of the money.

"We finally said enough is enough," Kegebein said.

Womack disagreed with Kegebein, saying the NCAAA volunteers worked just as hard as the chamber's volunteers. Earlier this year, the Watsonville City Council voted to accept NCAAA's application to operate this year's Fly-In.

Without the chamber's help this year, Womack said organizing the event took more effort than she thought. In some cases, the NCAAA had to "reinvent the wheel," meaning that certain work normally done by the chamber now had to be done by association members who didn't have the experience to do it.

The city required the NCAAA to pay a \$20,000 fee, which included leasing the airport and providing police. Womack said the event will cost about \$130,000 to put on.

Womack said last year city officials only required about \$8,000 in fees, but it actually cost Watsonville about \$18,000.

This year, with city finances tight because of earthquake-recovery costs, city officials could not take any losses, Womack said.

The event will include pre-1955 aircraft professionally manufactured and those built by individuals at home. There will be six categories of aircraft entered in the competition, including entries from the Pioneer Age between 1906 to 1927.

Winners in each category will receive trophies. A special medallion will be awarded to the best aircraft that must be at least 50 years old. The plane, however, must have been flown to the airport.

There will be food and drinks served at the event and an air show will be presented on Saturday and Sunday at noon.

On Friday, the gates open at noon and close at 5 p.m. Admission is \$3 general and free for senior citizen and children under 12.

For Saturday and Sunday, admission will be \$7 general, \$3 for senior citizens and children between 6 and 12. Children under 5 get in free. Gates will open at 7 a.m. and close at 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.