

# Date change aims to make fly-in soar

Organizers looking at October for good weather, less competition

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WATSONVILLE — Watsonville Fly-In organizers plan to move the annual air show from Labor Day weekend to October in 2014.

The date change, the second in

five years, is an attempt to grow an event that showcases Watsonville Municipal Airport and raises money for local charities, but has struggled in recent years.

The exact date has yet to be determined for what will be the 50th anniversary of the community

event. But organizers said moving the event from a holiday weekend with an abundance of competing events to October, which historically provides some of the nicest weather of the year, could make the fly-in soar.

"There's no air show if we don't

have the weather," said Hank Wempe, president of the nonprofit Watsonville Fly-In.

Fog put a damper on the air show in nine of 10 years before the event was shifted from its traditional

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DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

With the enormous tail of a military transport plane in the background, Eric Presen of Sonoma cranks the propeller on his replica of a 1907 Bleriot at the 2011 Watsonville Fly-In.

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slot on Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day in 2009. The weather improved, but the air show's fortunes have not.

Wendy Mann, who's been treasurer of the nonprofit for the past three years, said a sagging economy put a drag on attendance, but organizers will use the lessons learned during the rough patch to make improvements. For example, an independent survey conducted during the most recent event revealed the majority of air show attendees were 35 and older, 40 percent were 50 and older, and 40 percent had incomes of \$100,000 or more. Mann said there's room to grow in the youth and Latino communities, a consideration organizers will take into account as they plan activities.

"I'm really excited about the 50th," Mann said, adding a kickoff event would be held after the first of the year and more details would be available then.

Despite a dispute that led to a last-minute withdrawal by the promoter, organizers said the air show did better this year than in 2012. More than 4,000 people attended, and the number of planes on display nearly doubled. The number of out-of-town pilots made the increase particularly encouraging,

Wempe said. In 2012, of 90 planes on exhibit, 76 were based at the airport. This year, nearly all the 170-plus aircraft came from outside the area, he said.

Mann reported \$4,000 in donations to local charities from the 2013 proceeds, including \$2,500 to the Lions Club, \$1,000 to Boy Scouts Troop 558 and \$500 to the Watsonville Police Activities League.

Wempe and Mann said they plan to campaign harder for sponsorships for the 2014 event. If sponsorships cover expenses, the gate can go to charities, Wempe said. The Sentinel was a sponsor of the 2013 show.

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