

Air show will fly after all

Fly-In

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■ **Watsonville:** Local businesses and pilots will stage their own smaller-scale event over Memorial Day weekend.

BY FRANK SWEENEY
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Thirty-four years of air show tradition will continue at Watsonville Municipal Airport this Memorial Day weekend after all.

Abandoned by the Wings of History air museum, which is moving its antique aircraft fly-in to Moffett Field in Mountain View on June 19-20, Watsonville's business community and pilots organizations are re-

grouping to stage their own event on a smaller scale this year.

"It's true, the air show is alive and well," said Don French, manager of Watsonville Municipal Airport, where the annual gathering of hundreds of antique aircraft from all over the country has taken place since 1964.

French and the sponsoring Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce will have the help of volunteers from

San Jose who worked on Watsonville shows in the past because not all members of the Santa Clara County-based antique aircraft group that moved the show agreed with the decision.

"We've got two factions, one group running the museum, the other group interested in flying," said Amelia Reid of San Jose, who operates a flight school at Reid-Hillview Airport and plans to fly an aerobatic

performance at both air shows. "A lot of them were very upset that they pulled out of Watsonville."

On Monday, the Wings of History air museum in San Martin, which ran the Watsonville show as a fundraiser, said it will move the event to Moffett Field on Fathers' Day weekend, where the show will be co-sponsored by the Moffett Field Historical Society.

Money from the show had supported the air museum, adjacent to South County Airport in San Martin, where enthusiasts are working to preserve Santa Clara Valley aviation

history. But museum officials said the show lost money the past three years in Watsonville, because it faced stiff competition from other Memorial Day weekend events. Attendance last year was a little more than half that of the early 1990s.

Moving to the Santa Clara Valley, on a different weekend, would give the show a much bigger audience base and hasten museum expansion, they said.

Wings of History, formerly the Northern California Antique Aircraft Association, had been a co-sponsor

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with the chamber of commerce since the show's inception. The museum was founded later.

At Watsonville Airport, French said, the fly-in will be just as it has been in most years before the full slate of big-name — and costly — air show acts began appearing in recent years. "We'll have more local performers," he said.

Down to choices

"Our goal is totally different," French said. "Their goal was to be as profitable as possible to support the air museum, and we all support them in that. They had two choices — reduce the show to what it was five or six years ago to be profitable but not on as large a scale, or go to a location where they can be larger. Fortunately for them, the opportunity at Moffett opened up."

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— Amelia Reid of San Jose

French said the Watsonville fly-in, by cutting some costs and scaling back the show to the level of a decade ago, can be profitable, too. "We can still make a few dollars that can go back into the non-profit community in Watsonville."

French said there is no ill will between the groups. "They did something they had to do to accomplish

what they wanted. Their goal was to get bigger and bigger. Our goal was to maintain what we have — we don't need to get bigger," French said.

"The (Watsonville) air show is as big as it's ever going to get," French added. "I think that's fine."

Challenges ahead

French said local pilots' groups, including the Watsonville Pilots Association, the Experimental Aircraft Association and the Monterey Bay Ninety-Nines, met Tuesday to form the new show's organizational structure. The next task, he said, will be to raise \$75,000 in seed money, funds the museum had provided in the past. And they are looking for corporate sponsorship.

French said the air show pumps about \$500,000 into the Watsonville economy over the holiday weekend, mostly in hotels, rental cars and food sales.