



## TWO YOUNG MEN WORK TO PRESERVE ARTIFACTS AT N.C. AVIATION MUSEUM

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A pair of fellows who were not born until some 50 years after World War II ended have set their sights on **preserving** memorabilia from that war — and other military and aviation artifacts — at the **N.C. Aviation Museum**.

The museum began as the Foundation for Aircraft Preservation, created by Asheboro businessmen Jim Peddycord and Craig Branson in 1996. Peddycord and his son, Rick, died in a mid-air collision in 1997 while practicing for the foundation's second air show. Branson died in 2006.

The museum occupies two hangars at the Asheboro Regional Airport. It features a number of planes, extensive displays of artifacts and memorabilia from World War II through the Vietnam War, and a museum shop.

Next month, plans will be unveiled to build a new terminal building at the airport to replace one that dates to the 1970s. The new facility, approximately 12,000 square feet, will have a restaurant, meeting space, and an area devoted to a Hall of Fame.

North Carolina legislators tapped the aviation museum as the future home of a state aviation Hall of Fame in 2001. Letters on the exterior of one of the hangars note that it houses the North Carolina Aviation Museum & Hall of Fame, but there is only a museum. A Hall of Fame has never been developed. The vision is to fund the terminal project with local, state and federal funds, as well as private donations.

The plans do not include museum upgrades. The city of Asheboro owns the hangars, and the museum has a 30-year lease on them.

Dalton Bequette, who is 23, and Patrick Lawrence, 19, say their immediate goal is to install air conditioning in the hangars to preserve decades-old items — uniforms, firearms, period newspapers, and more. A less-expensive, but effective alternative, they say, would be to purchase sealed cases to better protect the fragile artifacts from dirt and temperature changes.

“This is our heritage,” said Bequette in a recent interview. “This is North Carolina’s aviation history and that’s what needs to be preserved.”

### **Young history buffs**

Bequette listened to his grandfather and other veterans tell “war stories” as a child. His grandfather instilled in him a love of aviation — and of his country.

“I’ll never forget it to this day,” Bequette said, “he could not listen to the national anthem without crying.”

Bequette and his wife, Katie, got married a year and a half ago in one of the museum hangars. The setting coupled his passions and her fascination with the 1940s.

Lawrence is a history buff, like his father, Reid. His grandfather served in Korea, three of his grandfather’s brothers in World War II. His father started taking him to the aviation museum when he was just 4 or 5.

“I grew up with the B-25 being restored,” Lawrence said. “This museum is one of the reasons I started collecting.”

Branson purchased a B-25 for restoration in 1998; restoration was completed in 2004 and the plane made limited flights for a time.

Lawrence was in the fifth grade when he started his own collection of military memorabilia. He was dismayed when the B-25 left the Asheboro museum for a museum in Ohio in the late 2000s. He dreamed that one day, when he grew up, he would lend his efforts to the museum.

He thought that day would be many years down the road.

That was before he met Bequette.

### **Chance encounter**

The pair met when a winter storm was bearing down on Randolph County in February. They both

wound up on the same aisle in an Asheboro store, rushing to buy supplies so they could work on models if they got snowed in.

They talked for 45 minutes in the store and remain fast friends today.

Bequette, a museum volunteer since May, said the idea of air conditioning hit him like a heat wave when he stepped into one of the sweltering hangars last June during a break from activities at the annual fly-in, a museum fund-raiser. Bequette was in uniform, along with his buddies who are part of a World War II reenacting and living history group.

It would feel good if the museum was cool, he thought.

He realized that museum visitors probably would appreciate a cooler space, too.

Later, he started thinking about the toll fluctuating temperatures had on the museum's artifacts — from freezing (or below) in the winter to 100 degrees (or higher) in the summer.

Uniforms and some related gear are in cases with plexiglass fronts, but the cases are not air-tight. There are gaps around the edges of the plexiglass.

Bequette and Lawrence have kicked off an online fundraising effort at gofundme (<http://www.gofundme.com/tu2cacgk>). The goal is \$80,000. As of Friday, donations totaled just \$131, but Bequette and Patrick are not discouraged.

They are brainstorming other ways to raise money — among them, a concert and contest to create “nose art” (the term for personalized airplane decorations) — as well as exploring the notion of bringing more warbirds back to the museum.

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