

Museum campaign takes off

Posted by Ian Thompson... June 4th, 2011

Tough times do not necessarily mean dark times.

That's illustrated in Fairfield through a vibrant effort to build a new museum near Travis Air Force Base to serve as a historical and educational hub for our nation's significant aerospace advances and achievements.

Backers of the fundraising campaign have a sweeping vision, one that's implied in the proposed facility's name. It's the Jimmy Doolittle Air and Space Museum at Travis Air Force Base Heritage Center, named after the famed World War II Army Air Forces commander who led a flight of 16 B-25 Mitchell bombers that took off April 18, 1942, from the aircraft carrier USS Hornet to strike several cities in Japan.

The campaign to build the new museum is tied to that daring feat. The foundation is in the midst of raising \$12.5 million to break ground in time for the 70th anniversary of Doolittle's air raid. If all goes well, construction could begin by mid-2012 with a grand opening a little more than a year later.

The Doolittle family has been a strong backer of plans for the current and future Travis museums.

The Travis Air Force Base Historical Society, predecessor of the Jimmy Doolittle Air and Space Museum Foundation, earned a nod from Gen. Doolittle himself in 1989 as the Travis Air Museum took flight. Gen. Doolittle's son, retired Air Force Col. John Doolittle, supports the current fundraising campaign.

Thus far, things are going well. The Wings of Valor Capital Campaign kicked off in January with co-chairmen Herman Rowland Sr., chairman of Jelly Belly Candy Company, and Jay Adair, chief executive officer of Copart. The campaign hit the \$1 million donations mark in April and is working toward its next fundraising milestone.

Plans for the museum include an interactive theater, food court, mezzanine conference center, library, restoration shop, artifact room, gift shop and classrooms.

The new museum will replace the 45,000-square-foot museum established in 1982, which at its height attracted more than 60,000 visitors a year. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, access to the on-base museum was severely limited because of security concerns.

There are numerous ways to turn the foundation's plans into a reality, from small cash donations to sizable name-recognition opportunities.

The latter begin at \$10,000 and rise to a whopping \$5 million and include each of the 36 aircraft planned for the indoor-outdoor facility, the major rooms, exhibits and attractions, and the grounds and museum building itself.

These are big dollars, but this is a big project. Once completed, the museum will once again serve as a tourist magnet to Fairfield and Solano County — a boon to all who live and work here.

It's important to note that no public money will be used to turn the dream of the Jimmy Doolittle Air and Space Museum into a reality. In these post-Great Recession times, that's a most welcome relief. Donations are also tax-deductible, another welcome relief.

To help with the cause, call the capital campaign office in Fairfield at 425-4625, ext. 109.