



# Connections



Saturday afternoon at Wings in 1939 shows an airplane coming in over Narcissa Road and landing on Runway 36. Until the late 1950s pilots had their choice of three runways at Wings.

## Wings will celebrate 75 years of aviation history in May

Although Kitty Hawk was where flight began, Wings Field is where much of the progress in general aviation got a start. Airport lighting used the world over began in a small shop on Wings Field. Navy pilots avoided accidents because of a device developed at Wings. The first navigation radios designed for small aircraft were tested and manufactured at the field. The largest civilian aviation organization in the world began at Wings and still holds its annual meeting there. At one time forty years ago, Wings was the third busiest airport in Pennsylvania. And, after World War II, it was regarded as a "mecca of corporate aviation" on the East Coast.

Notables like presidents, vice presidents, governors, senators, mayors, admirals, movie stars, and professional athletes have used Wings Field. In its earliest years the runways hosted aircraft from biplanes and autogyros to

the nation's first airliners (Ford Trimotors, Lockheed Lodestars, DC-3s) that dwarf the single engine airplanes that dominate the field today.

These are some of the highlights of the 75 years of history that Wings Field will celebrate on Saturday, May 21, 2005, when it hosts an all-day gala featuring some of the aircraft and personalities that were popular at the field in its earliest days for aviators and guests.

As part of its celebration, Wings has written a 190 page "autobiography" that describes life at one of the nation's longest continually operating private airfields. Titled *Wings Field Autobiography* and available in April 2005, the book includes 131 photographs of life at the field during the past 75 years. You can reserve your copy by calling the Wings Pilot Shop at 215.646.0400 or by emailing [Book@WingsField.com](mailto:Book@WingsField.com).

## Conceptual design project begun for replacement hangars at Wings Field

Wings Field has hired an engineering firm to provide its owners with conceptual designs and alternatives for replacing four old wood-frame hangars near the airport entrance on Narcissa Road.

This *Conceptual Design*, under the direction of the Bureau of Aviation, will be prepared in accordance with Federal Aviation Administration requirements for airport development projects and hangar designs. It is a precursor for an *Environmental Assessment* that is required for compliance with the National Environmental Policies Act of 1969.

An important step in the process is communicating the airport's plans to the community. Officials at Wings Field will host an open house/workshop on Saturday, May 21, 2005, from 12 noon until 3:00 p.m. in the Driscoll Terminal Building to present their plans. All neighbors and members of the surrounding community are encouraged to attend.

The engineer's work product will include an on-site assessment of the condition of the four existing hangar buildings, recommendations and an evaluation of the cost-effectiveness for rehabilitating each building, and at least two "build" alternatives for replacing the buildings. They will also provide architectural renderings for the proposed hangars. Each alternative will be structured within the context of Whitpain Township's zoning, planning, and building requirements.

# Issue in Focus

## Infrastructure improvement plans outlined

Four generations of Wings Field owners have been consistent in their plans for improving the facilities at the airport. Every plan has included extending the runway, replacing the old, dilapidated hangars, and adding new hangars as a substitute for many of the outdoor tie-down parking spots.

On July 17, 1986, the Whitpain Township Zoning Hearing Board approved a plan that would allow Wings to lengthen its runway and build new hangars and tie-down pads. This Wings plan included storage space for 153 aircraft. After 19 public hearings held over two years, the Zoning Board gave its unanimous approval and went against the wishes of township supervisors. Whitpain and Wings then went to court and appealed various aspects of the zoning board decision. Litigation dragged out for four more years, reaching Montgomery County Court in 1987 and Pennsylvania's Commonwealth Court late in 1988. Wings finally prevailed in the state Supreme Court in July 1990.

Wings Field Preservation Associates, L.P. (WFPA), the owners of the airport, laid out its plans for the development of Wings Field in public hearings shortly after it acquired the airport on October 30, 1998. The group's *Airport Layout Plan*, as required and approved by the FAA and the Commonwealth's Bureau of Aviation in 1999, set forth the only changes WFPA has ever envisioned:

1. **Extension of runway** from 2,600 to 3,700 feet. Status: Completed in 2001.
2. Installation of a **Visiting Aircraft Parking Apron** to move the concentrated area of noise and engine fumes from visiting aircraft from the terminal area closer to the center of the airport. Status: Design work completed; in August 2003 township supervisors denied Wings a construction permit; Wings' appeal was heard in the Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas on October 22, 2004; township's decision was upheld by the county court; that decision is on



- Hangar 1** built in 1938; 6 aircraft share hangar
- Hangar 2** built in late-1937; 4 aircraft share hangar
- Hangar 3** oldest hangar was built in 1931; 8 T-hangars
- Hangar 4** built in 1931; 9 T-hangars
- Hangar 5** built in 1954; 8 aircraft share community hangar; 10 T-hangars added in mid-1960s
- Hangar 6** built in 1946; 12 T-hangars

Aerial photograph shows Wings' hangar and terminal complex today.

- appeal.
3. **Hangar renovation** including replacing the old, dilapidated hangars and constructing new hangars as a substitute for many of outdoor tie-down parking spots. Status: Updated Airport Layout Plan under review by Pennsylvania Bureau of Aviation and Conceptual Design for first phase of project started in March 2005.

### *Capacity today is below approved Whitpain Township plan*

The 1988 Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court opinion allowed 153 aircraft to be based at the airport. However, Wings today is configured to store only 141 aircraft, 57 (40%) in hangars and 84 (60%) in outdoor, fully-exposed tie-down spots. Wings Field's long-term plan, as detailed in its official Airport Layout Plan, calls for a total capacity of 152 aircraft.

### *Outside tie-downs dominate current airport configuration*

The current set-up of 57 hangars includes 36 "T-hangars" and spaces in

84 outside tie-down spots represent 60% of Wings' capacity. Most of these aircraft owners want hangars.



three "community hangars" for 21 aircraft. Among the 84 outdoor tie-down spots are spaces for 67 planes owned by customers based at Wings Field and 17 spaces for visiting aircraft.



View of a Wings T-hangar building #4.

### *Plan calls for replacement of old hangars*

Wings would like to tear down Hangars 1 through 4, which were built between 1931 and 1938 and currently hold 27 aircraft, and replace them with modern hangar buildings. Up to 33 aircraft will share space in the planned single story, steel replacement hangars. The Conceptual Design project that was started in March 2005 focuses on these hangars.



# "Ancient" hangars falling apart



A walk through the 50 to 75 year-old hangars at Wings Field reveals the obvious -- the dilapidated buildings need to be replaced.

The roofs on the wood-frame buildings leak, the wood is rotting, window frames are falling apart, parts of the structures are unsound, doors stick, and the pavement is cracked. One-third of the T-hangars do not have doors.

The first four hangar rows were built between 1931 and 1938; a fifth row, which recently suffered a partial roof collapse, was built in the mid-1940s; a sixth row was added in the mid-1950s and supplemented in the mid-1960s.

Unlike other airports where most of the airplanes are stored in hangars, 60% of the aircraft at Wings Field are stored outside in the open fields, tied down by ropes on asphalt or grass slabs. Most of the owners of these "tied-down" aircraft want to store their airplanes indoors in a hangar. Unfortunately, none are available.

## ***Hangars protect aircraft***

A hangar is nothing more than a garage



for an airplane -- i.e., four walls, a concrete slab, a roof, and a locked door. Few homeowners leave their valuable SUVs, Camrys, and BMWs parked outside and exposed to ice, hail, falling branches, high winds, torrential down-pours, traffic, and car thieves. It's the same for owners of aircraft. They have tens of thousands of dollars invested in radios, flight computers, and other electronic equipment -- let alone the airplane and engine themselves -- that are sensitive to heat, cold, humidity, and precipitation. And, since the 9-11 terrorist attack, they are more and more concerned about storing their aircraft behind closed doors, securely under multiple locks and keys.

## ***Hangars enhance security***

The U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in its May 2004 *Security Guidelines for General Aviation Airports* provided airport owners with a set of security "best practices." The TSA guidelines say, "Storage in hangars is one of the most effective methods of securing GA aircraft."



## **Wings Businesses**

### **Montgomery County Flight Academy**



Three months after Henri Merriken's Triple Springs dairy farm was purchased and turned into an airfield in May 1930, the Wings Flying School opened for business. Lewin Barringer, the young pilot who discovered the farm, began teaching his friends how to fly gliders. Soon students were flying powered planes. In the 75 years since, thousands of others earned their private pilot licenses at Wings.

Today, the Montgomery County Flight Academy continues the long Wings flight training tradition. Academy director Tom Dougherty says that his flight school has nine flight instructors, 12 single-engine and one twin-engine aircraft in its fleet. "We have over 100 active students and another 400 experienced pilots who use our services for advanced training, flight reviews, and aircraft rental," says Dougherty. "We're proud that during 2004 more than 20 students earned their private pilot licenses."

Student pilots learn at their own pace at the flight academy. "Some take a couple of lessons a month and need a year or more to get their license," says Dougherty. "Others who opt for our progressive flight training program can pass their flight tests within a few months." Cost for the Academy's *Total Private Pilot Program* is \$4,999.95.

Interested future aviators can "try it out" with a 30-minute *Discovery Flight* costing \$49.99.

For more details, check out the Wings Field website at [www.WingsField.com](http://www.WingsField.com) and then click on the "Flight School" icon at the top. Or call Tom Dougherty directly at 215.628.3339.

# Wings Facts

## *New look at Wings*

Exciting things are happening at Wings Field. Since Tom Dougherty and his Montgomery County Aviation crew took over the operation of the airport on March 1, 2004, they have made major improvements to the 75 year-old facility.

“We’ve invested a lot of money in new landscaping, picnic tables, fresh coats of paint, and renovations to the Driscoll Terminal Building,” says Dougherty.

“We’re trying to bring this historic old field back to its glory days when it was one of the favorite general aviation airports on the East Coast.”

Dougherty is bringing back the popular Wings Luncheonette that served pilots, mechanics, airport employees, and

visitors for thirty years from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s. And, coming soon, Dougherty plans to expand the airport’s pilot shop.

## *Get a bird’s eye view of your neighborhood*

Have you ever wanted to see your neighborhood from 1,000 feet in the air? Or, how about treating that special someone to a romantic flight through the sky, soaring like Superman over Center City, the stadiums, the Chesapeake Bay, Jersey shore, or the Poconos? Or the Canyon Run, a thrilling flight up the Hudson River at 900’ with Manhattan and its skyscrapers to your right, the Statue of Liberty to your left, and the George Washington Bridge straight ahead? Call Montgomery County Aviation at 215.646.0400 and they can make it happen.

## *Wings parking apron appeal heard in Court of Common Pleas*

The Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas heard arguments from attorneys representing Whippain Township and Wings Field on October 22, 2004. Wings filed an appeal to overturn an August 2003 vote by township supervisors denying a permit to build a special parking area for visiting aircraft at Wings. On January 18, 2005, the court denied Wings' appeal of the Township's decision. The airport is appealing the court's decision and Wings officials plan to resubmit their plans for the parking apron to the Township.

## Aircraft Watch

At almost any hour of the day, there are people of all ages watching aircraft take-off and land at Wings Field. Here is some information on three of the airplanes based at Wings.

### *American Eurocopter BK117*



Owner: University of Pennsylvania  
Primary Uses: 100% medical evacuation  
Seats: 5 (1 pilots, 1 nurse, 1EMT/medic, 2 patients)  
Cruise Speed: 150 mph  
Range: 200 miles non-stop  
Weight: 7,000 lbs.

### *Piper Archer*



Owner: Montgomery County Aviation  
Primary Uses: 80% flight training, 20% rental  
Seats: 4 (1 pilot and 3 passengers)  
Cruise Speed: 145 mph  
Range: 450 miles non-stop  
Weight: 2,550 lbs.

### *Piper Navajo Chieftain*



Owner: Blue Bell Air, LLC  
Primary Uses: 100% business  
Seats: 8 (2 pilots and 6 passengers)  
Cruise Speed: 212 mph  
Range: 800 miles non-stop  
Weight: 7,045 lbs.