

COMBAT AIR MUSEUM

→ → → Plane Talk → → →

The Official Newsletter of the Combat Air Museum

Forbes Field Topeka, Kansas

June / July 2007 • Vol. 23, No. 3

There was lots of entertainment at this year's Celebrity Pancake Feed

Combat Air Museum's 2007 edition of its Celebrity Pancake Feed proved to be another big success. Thanks to the efforts of **Gene Howerter**, we had many new faces among our 25 celebrity flippers, and several others who have become regular participants of this annual fundraising event. **Bob Carmichael** of **Perkins Restaurant** was Chief Flipper and provided the pancake mix, sausage, syrup, butter, and milk. This year Bob used a second grill to help cut down the time people waited in line for their pancakes. The ticket count came in at 574 attendees, and our net proceeds were over \$1,700.

We expanded our entertainment this year, much to the appreciation of our pancake eaters. Member **Dan Pulliam** had his Fifth Grade musicians from **Williams Science and Fine Arts** and **Scott Computer Technology Magnet schools** back this year to play for us. Also, for the first time we had **Beverly Bernardi Post** and 30 students from her **Conservatory of Dance** in costume to perform for the crowd. Beverly also got a few adults to

"Pancake Feed," con't. on page 10

Photos by Don Mathers



Above: Flippers Nancy and Ray Irwin and Bob Carmichael watch as Norton Bonaparte flips a fresh batch of pancakes.
Below: Dan Pulliam directs his band students in a musical number.

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Museum Hours

Monday - Saturday

9 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.

Last Admission 3:30 P.M.

Sunday Noon - 4:30 P.M.

Last Admission 3:30 P.M.

Plane Talk, the official newsletter

of Combat Air Museum

of Topeka, Kansas,

is published bi-monthly.

Your questions and

comments are welcomed.

Any information for **Plane Talk**
should be submitted to CAM office.



Joe Higgins

Founding member, friend and mentor

In Memoriam

Joseph "Joe" Higgins

July 28, 1923 –

April 27, 2007

#33

30 years member

Combat Air Museum lost one of its truest friends, who was also a member and volunteer, on April 27, 2007 when **Joe Higgins** died from injuries suffered in a traffic accident April 24. Joe was a founding member of CAM, one of a group of people who had a vision of forming a military aviation museum in Topeka. Over the next three decades Joe weathered the good and the bad associated with operating a private not-for-profit organization geared towards the restoration and preservation of aircraft and artifacts associated with military aviation history.

Early in the Museum's history, when CAM was located in Hangar 626 at Forbes Field, Joe and a handful of other members joined aircraft collector

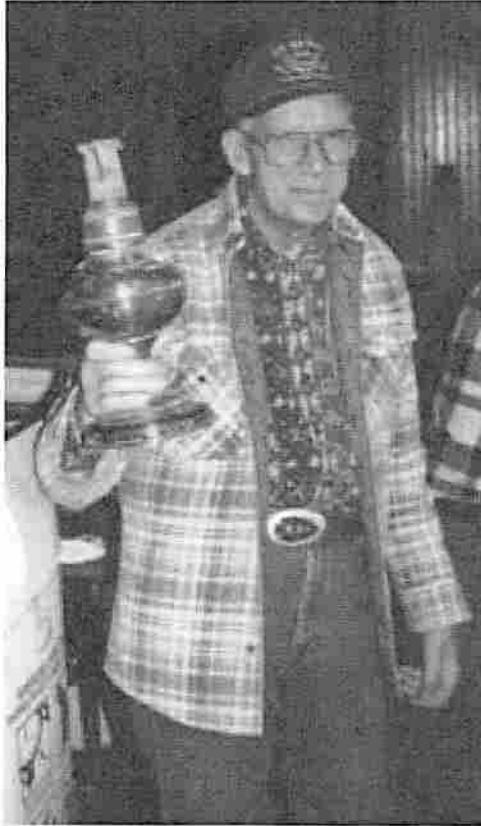
David Tallichet on a trip to Nicaragua to recover two North American T-28 Trojan and one Douglas A-26 Invader aircraft. It was a bit of an adventure for the group. While in Nicaragua, they were ushered to a waiting area at the airport because one of the aircraft was not yet ready for delivery to Tallichet. Although the A-26's purchase had taken place and the appropriate documents had cleared, the plane was still being flown by government forces against Sandinista rebels. It had just returned from a mission, and the group had to wait while the armament was removed from the plane.

Their flight plan back to the US had them flying off the eastern seaboard of Mexico so as to not fly through Mexican airspace with "military/combat" aircraft. This apparently worked well until they neared Brownsville, Texas and Tallichet experienced fuel problems with the T-28 he was flying.

He landed on a Mexican roadway, and then enlisted the local populace to get fuel for the plane. Once the tanks were filled enough, Tallichet made his takeoff from the road, allegedly just ahead of the local federales.

Joe brought to the Museum many talents that helped make CAM what it is today. There were very few aspects of working in the Museum in which Joe did not take part. He was much involved in the planning, preparation, and working the air shows. A lot of his time was spent in making improvements to the two hangars and associated grounds that make up CAM. His vocation as an electrician was especially put to use in Museum projects. Joe installed power and lighting to the Workshop and Carpenter Shop when they were built, and wired many exhibits around the Museum. He also designed and installed the lighting for the Art Gallery.

As time and age kept Joe from doing heavy labor projects, he devoted his talents to working with wood for Gift Shop items. He planed, cut out and finished the wood bases on which .50 caliber machine gun shells and hand grenades were mounted for sale in the gift shop. He



Joe Higgins and a garage sale treasure

also polished the .50 caliber shells. Joe also made a number of wood pen and pencils for the Gift Shop, turning and polishing the wood shafts on his lathe in the workshop, then assembling the units.

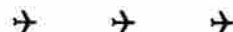
Everyone could just about set his or her week dates by Joe. His volunteer days were Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and we all joked about how he messed up everyone's schedule if he showed up on a Tuesday.

Joe was a member of the "Greatest Generation." He served in the Army Air Corps during World War II as a gunner on B-24 Liberator bombers in the 776th Bombardment Squadron, 464th Bombardment Group, Fifteenth Air Force. His outfit initially flew out of North Africa, then moved to Italy. Joe's aircraft was shot down by flak on his 19th mission on July 5, 1944. Joe parachuted safely into the sea and was trying to get out of his parachute harness when the wind

caused his chute to billow and drag him through the water. Joe said he could see water over his feet and to his right and left, which meant the shore was behind him. He let the chute drag him into shallow water. He was captured almost immediately after he came onto the beach and became a prisoner of the German government. British troops liberated his Prisoner of War camp at 11 a.m. May 2, 1945.

Joe's POW experiences were put to use when the POW barracks exhibit was built. Many of his POW documents were copied and placed with the exhibit. Last year Joe donated the original documents and other letters, papers, and clippings associated with his POW status to CAM's archives.

We will miss Joe's presence, and will probably miss most his conversations at the lunch table. He left his mark in so many ways and places at CAM. We will always be grateful for knowing Joe and having his time and service with the Museum.





National History Day contestants make presentations on "Triumph and Tragedy"

Four juniors from **Seaman High School** (Topeka) were our guest presenters at the April Membership Luncheon. The four are members of an advanced honors history class taught by **Susan Sittenauer**. Susan has brought students to our April Membership Luncheons for several years, now.

As part of the honors class, each student has to prepare an entry for the annual National History Day contest. They have several formats in which to present their topic and can do this individually, as pairs or as an ensemble, depending on the format. The students have to use a minimum of 30 sources for their topics with the focus on primary sources, which are essentially first-hand type accounts.

The initial competition was at Washburn University (Topeka) on February 24. First and second place finishers qualified for the State competition held April 28th. First and second place finishers at the state level qualify for the national competition to be held in June at University of Maryland. Susan said that over 750,000 students compete nationwide in the contest.

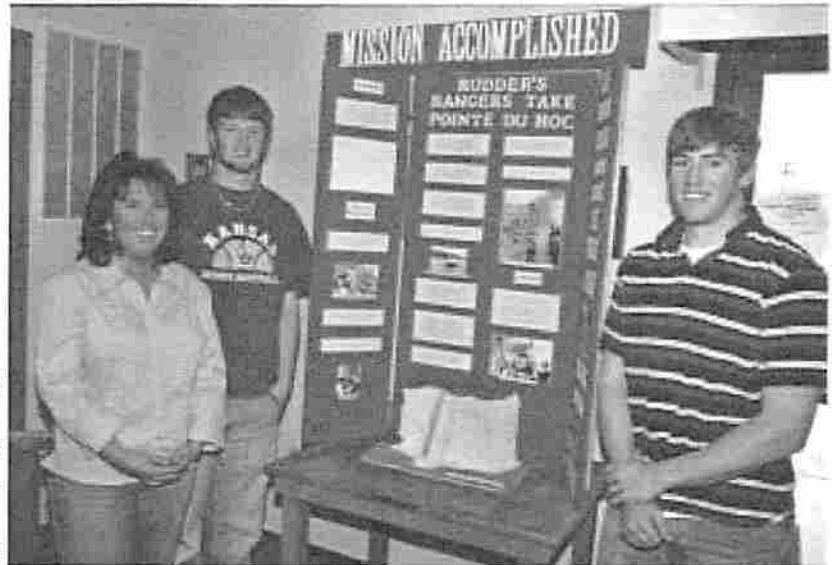
The four students at the April luncheon worked as pairs and both teams used a storyboard format for their presentation. The theme for this year's contest was "Triumph and Tragedy."

Kyle Wells and **Zach Carlson** presented "Rudder's Rangers Take Point Du Hoc." This event

happened during the Allied landings on the coast of Normandy, France on June 6, 1944. The 225 men of the US 2nd Ranger Battalion, under the command of Colonel James Earl Rudder, had to climb the cliffs of Point Du Hoc west of Omaha Beach in order to destroy six German gun emplacements at the top of the cliff. The Rangers had to use rope ladders and extended metal poles with ladder rungs to scale the 100-foot cliff. The ropes were attached to grapnel hooks fired up the cliff face. The ladders were brought ashore in segments that had to be assembled on the beach, under fire.

In a scene often repeated along the assault beaches that day, the Rangers hit the beach some 30 minutes late and at the wrong place. The naval bombardment against Point Du Hoc was on time, and when it started, the German forces backed out of their positions until the bombardment was over. They had resumed their positions and were well entrenched by the time the Rangers came ashore.

As they scaled the cliff, the Rangers came under heavy machine gun and small arms fire as well as hand grenades being thrown down onto them. By sheer perseverance, they did gain the top of the cliff and beat back the German resistance. The Battalion suffered over 50% casualties. About 175 Rangers reached the top of Point Du Hoc, and then more casualties occurred during the fighting there. The Rangers discovered that there



*Left: Susan with Kyle Wells and Zach Carlson.
Right: Susan Sittenauer, Patrick Wittenbach and Gabe Bullard.*

Photos by Don Mathers

were no guns in the emplacements, just wooden poles, but as they fanned out from the cliff top, the guns were discovered in an orchard and destroyed.

The Rangers had to hold off German counter attacks through the night and stayed atop Point Du Hoc an extra two and one-half days before being relieved.

Kyle and Zach said the Rangers had trained in Florida for their beach assault and in Tennessee for their climbing. Once in England they trained in their climbing using borrowed fire department ladders. They also found in their research that Colonel Rudder went on to become President of Texas A&M and opened the school to women during his tenure there.

The storyboard built by Kyle and Zach contained three panels with 22 text blocks, a map of Point Du Hoc and the beach below, and several illustrations with captions. They built a diorama of the cliff and bluff top with scaling ropes and ladders leading up the face of the cliff.

"August 1945. Triumph over Japan," was the topic chosen by **Gabe Bullard** and **Patrick Wittenbach** for their presentation. Their storyboard dealt with President Harry S. Truman's decision to drop atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. It was also made of three panels and included a timeline of 20 events beginning in August 1939 when Albert Einstein wrote a letter to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt about Nazi Germany's attempts to purify uranium U-235 that could be used to develop an atomic bomb. The timeline ended with the September 2, 1945 official surrender of the Japanese to Allied forces in Tokyo Bay.

Gabe and Patrick said the use of the two bombs is

still debated today as to whether they were necessary. They said that the Hiroshima blast killed approximately 90% of the medical staff in the city instantly, so there was virtually no one to care for the wounded. Over half the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed and their industrial capabilities were put out of service. Over 100,000 casualties occurred. They also stated that Einstein was a pacifist and against the use of the bomb. But as far as President Truman was concerned, he felt it was the right decision to use the bombs and did not agonize over his choice. Allied forces did not have to invade Japan and face Japanese fanatics who would fight to their death against any invaders. The bombs ended the war.

One of our members, **Colonel Hollis Logan** (UASF, Ret.) said that he was in B-29s in the Twentieth Air Force on Guam during this time. Most people did not know what the 509th Composite Group was doing until the day after the bomb was dropped. He also said the Enola Gay, the B-29 that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, had false markings painted on it in hopes the Japanese would recognize it as a weather aircraft.

In addition to the timeline, Gabe and Patrick's storyboard included 14 text blocks and nine illustrations with captions. They, too, built a diorama, theirs being the four major islands of Japan. They identified the locations of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Tokyo, and Mount Fuji on their respective islands.

Before they left Kyle and Zach, and Gabe and Patrick donated their storyboards to the Museum. They are now on exhibit. →

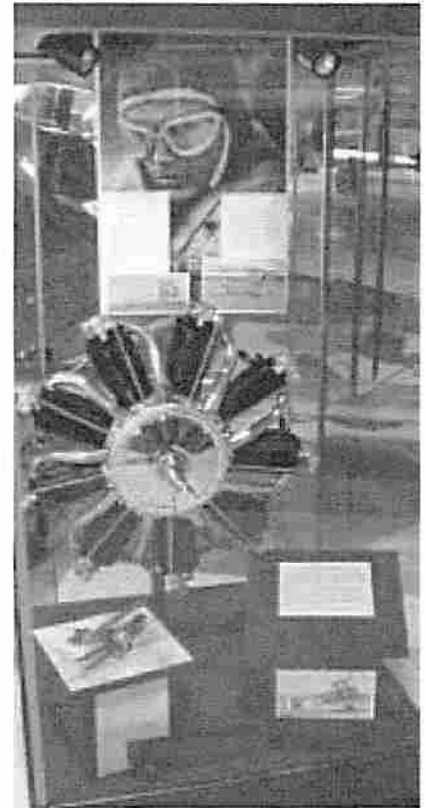
CAM opens new exhibits including artifacts from the Old Olathe Naval Air Museum

During April we turned on the lights for our latest exhibit. **Tom Witty** finished the exhibit on Naval Air Station (NAS) Olathe, Kansas, making good use of two large exhibit cases acquired a few years ago by **Gene Howerter**. By the time he was done, Tom had prepared six panels on the history of NAS Olathe, in effect, enough material to fill about six of the exhibit cases normally used.

The exhibit covers primarily the history of NAS Olathe from 1942-1970. There is also a section that covers the Naval Reserve presence at the former air station from 1975-1995. Today, the runways and remaining original structures make up just a part of today's New Century Air Center located on the outskirts of Gardner, Kansas. Although established as Naval Air Reserve Base Olathe, then Naval Air Station Olathe, the air station was much closer to Gardner than Olathe.

Old Olathe Naval Air Museum (OONAM) operated in the former Commanding Officer and Executive Officer's quarters from 1992-2004. In 1999, the museum had to condense into one building as the other was condemned for structural reasons. In the summer of 2003, OONAM representatives contacted Combat Air Museum telling us that OONAM would likely close in 2004, and they wanted to know if we could take their collection in order to keep the history of NAS Olathe alive. Several of CAM's board members traveled to OONAM and met with its Board of Directors. From that meeting, CAM later provided OONAM a letter indicating the items we felt we could take from their collection. In February 2004, OONAM closed and some 43 boxes full of artifacts as well as numerous individual items were transferred from OONAM to CAM. Not long after, the building housing the former OONAM was torn down and the site filled in.

During the first months after acquiring the materials from OONAM, CAM volunteers sorted through the boxes of artifacts and began storing the materials. A number of the artifacts involved military aviation, but were not directly linked to NAS Olathe. Soon, some of these artifacts were placed in other exhibits. A few of the stored boxes have military items and artifacts that are not aviation-related. But several boxes were directly related to NAS Olathe. These



The improved LeRhone exhibit.

included hundreds of photographs, documents, and physical artifacts. It took some time to sort and store the materials received from OONAM.

Then came the problem of how best to exhibit the history of NAS Olathe. We physically could not re-erect OONAM inside our hangars, and we were looking for the best ways and means to exhibit some of the items we had. Gene's acquisition of the two large cases solved this problem. The cases were placed end to end, forming essentially one very large exhibit area. The gap between the cases was filled with a board that allowed more display area. Then curator **Danny San**

Romani began moving boxes of artifacts, photos, and records to the library and basically told Tom, "Build it." No problem. Danny was not done, though, as he then began bringing down additional items too large to store in a box.

Tom began wading through all the material just to see what we had, then figured out what he could use to best tell NAS Olathe's story. This literally took months. **Martin Moyer** and **Amos Page** installed wood paneling on the back walls of the exhibit cases, and Tom then painted the case interiors. Danny and **Zak Amos** painted the exteriors.

In time we began to see paper exhibit panels taped to the library book shelves. These served as mockups for what would eventually go into the exhibit cases. Eventually the paper panels moved to the exhibit cases. Then we began to see real exhibit items replace the paper panels, until panel by panel the exhibit was in place. Tom applied a coat of paint to the floor of the cases and put in his last items. Lights were installed, and the exhibit was fully lighted for public viewing on the day of the Pancake Feed.

As they become available, Tom will add more model airplanes of the types used during NAS Olathe's 28-year history. We also have a few large insignia to place on top of the exhibit cases, but as it stands now the exhibit presents a great history of NAS Olathe, one of two Naval Air Stations established in Kansas. The other was NAS Hutchinson.

In our last issue of *Plane Talk* we pictured the LeRhone rotary engine acquired on loan from the National Museum of Naval Aviation. That exhibit has since changed considerably, thanks, again, to **Gene Howerter** and to **Martin Moyer**. These two recently acquired six beautiful glass exhibit cases for the Museum. The LeRhone and other materials are now in one of the cases.

Gene and Martin got the cases from a local mall that

had no further need for them. The overall dimensions are about 46½ inches X 46½ inches X 94 inches. Four of the cases have glass enclosures of 46½ inches X 46½ inches X 78 inches. The other two have glass enclosures of 46½ inches X 46½ inches X 52 inches. All six are mounted on casters. Gene and

Martin donated the money to buy three of the cases, and the mall gave them the other three. All said and done, these six cases cost \$25 each. One of them now holds the two storyboards given to us by the Seaman High School students.

Construction of a new exhibit is underway in the Hangar 604 workshop. Gene is refurbishing a case to house a collection of models of Soviet aircraft.

In 1995 Topeka hosted Treasures of the Czars for a five-month period, bringing thousands of people to the capital city to see the exhibits. CAM put together an exhibit of 10 model aircraft of the Soviet Union as a related topic. This exhibit remained until May 2000

**Old Olathe Naval Air Museum
(OONAM) operated in the
former Commanding Officer
and Executive Officer's quar-
ters from 1992 – 2004.**

"Exhibits," con't. on page 8



Above: The left side of the
NAS Olathe exhibit.
Right: And the right side.



"Exhibits," con't. from page 7

when it was taken down as we prepared to have a new floor covering installed in Hangar 602.

Through an acquisition made by **Dick Trupp** and **Gene Howerter**, we got an exhibit case that seemed tailor-made to put the Soviet models back on exhibit. Also, since the time the original models were placed in storage, we acquired additional models from three different donors. We now have 18 Soviet aircraft models with seven more in kit form.

We also had in storage a 30 inch X 40 inch photograph of Alexander Pokryshkin, a World War II hero of the Soviet Union and their second leading ace with 59 aerial victories. One of the models we have represents an aircraft Pokryshkin flew. Interestingly, it is an US-built Bell P-39 Airacobra.

Gene varnished the interior and exterior of the exhibit case and installed glass shelving to complement the existing wood shelves. Pokryshkin's photo is currently mounted on the rear wall of the case, and Gene is building frameworks to hold text panels and other photos. He is designing the case to allow additional models to be exhibited as they are built. ➔

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Morgan, & Luke

→ → →

**Join the
Combat Air
Museum!**

Aviation Education Classes for young people

Over the last several years Combat Air Museum has conducted classes for students between the ages of 7 and 15 in its **Aviation Education Class**, focusing on the history of aviation, principles of flight, parts of an airplane and how they work, weather and weather forecasting, aviation communications and flight control. These four-day long classes are conducted over schools' spring break and three times in the summer.

The cost of the class is \$40.00 per student. For an additional \$40.00, a student can take a real airplane flight and experience much of what is covered in the class curriculum, including communicating with a control tower and handling the flight controls. This is the kind of experience that hopefully might encourage a young person to pursue a related career in a physical science, physics or mathematics.

If you would like to have a child, a grandchild, and/or a young friend enroll in the Museum's Aviation Education Class, call the Museum at 862-3303. We are offering sessions in June, July and August. See "2007 Events Calendar" (page 12) for the dates and times. →

Visitors

During **March**
the Museum had
926 visitors
from 33 states
and
Canada
Costa Rica
Great Britain
Japan

During **April**
we had
697 visitors
from 35 states
and
Australia
Canada
Finland
Germany
Great Britain
Russia
Scotland

→ → →

**Visit our
website
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Above: The audience watching the pancake catching contest.

Right: The pancake is just above Drew Switzer's head. Katy Morgan and Steve Blake look on in the background.

Photos by Don Mathers



"Pancake Feed," con't. from page 1

take part in some line dancing. We now have a photographic record of **Dick Trupp**, **Ray Irwin** and **Gene Howerter** on the floor trying to keep up with Beverly and some of her dancers.

Greg Inkmann brought out some very small, electrically-powered, remote control airplanes and flew these in an area by the F11F-1 Blue Angel. **Don Mathers** had the Blue Angel cockpit open for folks to sit in. They could also have their picture taken while in the pilot seat if they wanted.

When Dan's band students were not playing or Beverly's students not dancing, we had hangar music courtesy of a sound system provided and set up by **Jim Leighton**. Dick and Gene also used the system to announce our celebrity flippers and the entertainment.

Gene was the play-by-play, or perhaps better said, the flip-by-flip announcer of the pancake catching competition among weather persons from Topeka's three

television stations. **Drew Switzer** of **WIBW-TV Channel 13**, **Katy Morgan** of **KSNT-TV Channel 27**, and **Blake Smith** of **KTKA-TV Channel 49** had their paper plates at the ready as Bob Carmichael flipped pancakes towards them. Each of the three was high stepping across the hangar floor trying to keep up with Bob's pancake deliveries. The competition was a real crowd pleaser, and the audience got to participate in choosing the winner. **Katy Morgan** got the blue ribbon for this year.

Ticket sales closed at noon, and volunteers began clearing the empty tables. By 1:10 p.m. the three planes we took out of the hangar were back in their places, the hangar doors were closed and the volunteers headed home. Thus ended Pancake Feed 2007. It had been a very busy morning, but one that was both successful and fun for attendees and volunteers alike.

→ → →



Our celebrity flippers included the following folks:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| Ben Bauman | KTKA-TV Channel 49
News Anchor |
| Alexandra Blasi | Miss Southwest Kansas |
| Norton Bonaparte | Topeka City Manager |
| H R Cook | Manager, Kansas Expocentre |
| Ted Ensley | Shawnee County Commissioner |
| Dr. Jerry Farley | President, Washburn University |
| Richard Forester | President, Visit Topeka, Inc. |
| Bill and Nancy Irwin | Owners, Heartland Park
Topeka Raceway |
| Ann Mah | State Representative |
| Jim Menge | Manager, Forbes Control Tower |
| Katy Morgan | KSNT-TV Channel 27
Weatherperson |
| John Nave | Topeka City Councilman |
| Belinda Post | Miss Sunflower |
| Jim Ryun | Kansas Sports Figure
and former US Representative |
| Lindsay Shively | WIBW-TV Channel 13
News Reporter |
| Blake Smith | KTKA-TV Channel 49
Weatherman |
| Bruce Steinbrock | WIBW AM/FM Sports Radio |
| Drew Switzer | WIBW-TV Channel 13
Weatherman |
| Ron Thornburgh | Kansas Secretary of State |
| Michelle Walthers | Miss Kansas |
| James Martin | #32 Washburn University Football |
| Andy Kavanaugh | #62 Washburn University Football |
| Jeff Rickard | #65 Washburn University Football |
| Ben Bianchino | #77 Washburn University Football |

Students from the Beverly Bernardi Post Conservatory of Dance entertained the audience.





Michelle Walthers, Miss Kansas, tries out the Blue Angel's controls at the annual Celebrity Pancake Feed. [see story on page 1]

2007 Events Calendar

Event dates subject to change

June

4-7 Aviation Education Class

July

9-12 Aviation Education Class

August

6-9 Aviation Education Class

September

29 Winged Foot 5K Run/Walk



Combat Air Museum
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