



Massachusetts Air and Space Museum launches in Hyannis

By Geoff Spillane

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Offerings to include flight simulators, exhibits and live feed from space station.

HYANNIS — Massachusetts has played a significant role in the nation's air and space discoveries and achievements, and Cape Cod is where that heritage will be on display.

The Massachusetts Air and Space Museum will open later this month at Capetown Plaza on Route 132 in Hyannis.

The museum will be in a 5,000-square-foot storefront, formerly occupied by a women's accessories retailer, at the shopping center.

Shortly after a vintage F-106 fighter flight simulator and a three-quarter-scale Aeronca single-engine airplane were delivered Wednesday afternoon, two museum leaders spoke about the organization's history and the course it charted to Hyannis.

The museum was founded as a nonprofit organization in 2007 and has raised more than \$1 million, but has never had a physical location, according to Joseph Dini, chairman of the museum's board of directors.

A feasibility study was conducted after the organization was established to determine the need for such a museum in the Bay State, and locations including Plymouth, Otis Air National Guard Base on the Upper Cape and Hanscom Air Force Base in Bedford were considered. Because of interest from the Massachusetts Port Authority, Hanscom was the lead contender, but that never materialized for several reasons, including space constraints.

Dini said Hyannis became an option after a discussion with leaders of the local aviation community a few years ago.

Roland “Bud” Breault, former longtime manager of Barnstable Municipal Airport who retired in 2018, is a member of the museum’s board of directors.

“The opportunities for us, the Cape and visitors are boundless,” said Dini, adding that the museum eventually plans to expand its presence here.

Dini and Keith Young, another member of the museum’s board of directors, highlighted major air and space milestone events that have occurred in Massachusetts, underscoring the state’s importance in the field.

Achievements include an attempt to fly a glider off the Old North Church in the 1700s; the first aerial photograph, taken over Boston Common from a tethered balloon in the 1800s; the flight of the first sea planes off Gloucester in the early 1900s; the world’s first liquid fuel rocket being fired in Worcester in the 1930s; and the first commercial jet engines being built by General Electric in Lynn during the 1940s.

“We want to preserve that history,” said Dini, noting the state also has become home to many of the industry’s most successful companies, including Raytheon.

Adding a bit of local flavor, Dini said President John F. Kennedy’s mission to reach the moon was made possible by inventions from Charles Draper in Cambridge and astronaut space suits and space communications gear created by the David Clark Co. in Worcester.

“We never would have got to the moon without inventions from Massachusetts,” he said.

Education is a key component of the museum’s mission.

“We want the museum to be used as a basis for STEM and lifelong learning, as well as a platform for workforce development,” said Young, adding there is a shortage of aviation workers, including pilots, and a need to encourage pursuit of career paths in these industries.

“We are trying to restimulate youth to get them interested in aerospace and aviation,” he said, stressing the exhibits will provide an immersive experience, including virtual reality and flight simulators.

Initial exhibits will include an 86-inch screen for remote control drone simulation, two flight simulators with 15 screens and chairs, nonflying aircraft replicas and several virtual reality experiences. There also will be exhibits focused on women in aviation, the Coast Guard and the role of Massachusetts — past and present — in air and space. A monitor positioned slightly off the floor will provide a live feed from the International Space Station, allowing visitors to “look down to see what they see.” There also will be a museum store.

New exhibits will be added regularly, according to Dini, who said he looks forward to feedback from visitors.

Supporters of the museum, according to its website, include General Electric, MassPort, the state Department of Transportation’s Aeronautics Division, the MIT Museum and Draper Laboratory.

Chestnut Hill-based WS Development is the current leaseholder on the 26-acre Capetown Plaza, which is anchored by one of the few remaining Kmart stores in the state. The property is owned by the town of Barnstable but under the care of the Barnstable Municipal Airport Commission.

Last summer, the company was the winning bidder to redevelop the aging shopping center, entering into a 49-year lease that begins in 2024.

It plans to develop a \$45 million, 300,000-square-foot lifestyle center — called The Landing at Hyannis — that may include retail stores, restaurants, entertainment, office space, hospitality and service establishments, and fitness and medical centers in buildings that may have multiple stories.

“WS Development is excited to welcome the Massachusetts Air and Space Museum to Capetown Plaza and the future home of The Landing at Hyannis,” said Victoria Maguire, director of development for WS Development. “We have loved working with the group of dedicated volunteers who are bringing this museum to life, and we’re thrilled to be able

to offer them a temporary space on the property while plans for The Landing are finalized. With a host of interactive exhibits and fantastic memorabilia, we look forward to seeing the excitement of both kids and adults when they visit.”

“This thing is taking off,” Young said, pun intended.

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