Liberty Aviation Museum expands

By TOM JACKSON Sandusky Register 9-8-2026

PORTAGE TWP. - The Liberty Aviation Museum, a prominent local attraction focusing on aviation and American history, is bigger and better than ever. It's bigger because it has just added a large new hangar with about 12,000 square feet of space to supplement the museum's other two big hangars and its smaller hangars. And it continues to add more items and exhibits for people to look at. It has temporarily added a P-40 World War II-era fighter plane, although the plane's residence is expected to be temporary.

The museum is located at 3515 E. State Road at Erie-Ottawa International Airport, near Port Clinton, off of Ohio 53. It opened at its current location in 2012, although the museum's establishment dates back to the 1990s before it had a permanent location.



Ed Patrick, the museum's founder and CEO, said attendance has been rising. Counting visitors to the museum itself and to the Tin Goose Diner, an old-fashioned diner open seven days a week for breakfast and lunch, Liberty Aviation gets more than 120,000 visitors a year, Patrick said.

Liberty Aviation Museum's collection of flyable World War II vintage planes includes a P-40 fighter, bottom right, a B-25 Mitchell bomber, right, and a PBY Cataline flying boat, left.

The new hangar - Patrick said the museum is moving airplanes and other items into its new big hangar. That will provide better space for the museum's collection of vintage aircraft, vehicles and other historic items. The third hangar will be open soon for the general public. The opening of the hangar, by providing more space, will make it easier for the museum to raise money by serving as a host for special events. Lack of space has made that much harder as the museum's assets have grown, and the museum has had to crowd its airplanes close together.



A new World War II fighter - Thousands of Curtiss P-40 Warhawk fighter planes were made during World War II, and they served in many places, but the plane is best-known for being used by the Flying Tigers, a group of American volunteer pilots that operated in China against invading Japanese forces. The plane at the museum is decorated with Flying Tiger colors. The museum's plane is owned by Ed Wilsey, a Florida resident, and flown by Thom Richard. The plane is for sale and likely will leave the museum when it's sold; it's not known if that will take weeks, months or years, Patrick said. Richard, who flies the plane at air shows, said it is an "absolutely amazing" aircraft, second to none for performing maneuvers for an audience. Almost 30 flyable P-40 fighter planes are around, Richard said.



Because the P-40 is often away being flown at an air show, visitors who are determined to see it might consider calling ahead before driving out to the museum. The same advice applies to the museum's other flyable aircraft, such as its B-25 Mitchell bomber.

Other aircraft - Liberty Aviation Museum boasts a significant collection of flyable vintage aircraft, which are often away during the summer, making the rounds of various air shows. They include:

• A B-25 Mitchell medium bomber; Thousands of the twin-engine bombers served in many regions during World War II. The bomber is perhaps best known for its use in a surprise attack on Japan in April 1942, known as the Doolittle raid and depicted in the movie "Thirty Seconds over Tokyo."

• A Grumman TBM Avenger, a World War II torpedo bomber that operated off of aircraft carriers; The plane is owned and flown by Charlie Cartledge but is kept at the museum for visitors to enjoy.

• A 1928 Ford Tri-Motor aircraft; It's a historic airplane that was one of the original Transcontinental Air Transport aircraft that in 1929 began operating a combined air and railroad service that promised to speed wealthy travelers from New York City to Los Angeles in just 48 hours. The service passed through Ohio, with passengers in Columbus moving from a train to a Ford aircraft.



• A big Consolidated-Vultee PBY-6A Catalina; The amphibious plane was used in World War II for patrols and for bombing and torpedo attacks. It has a wingspan of 104 feet.



The museum also has other aircraft and sometimes plays host to visiting airplanes. To learn about events, visit the museum's website at libertyaviationmuseum.org and follow the museum's Facebook page.

A Ford Tri-Motor project - The museum also serves as the location for a Ford Tri-Motor aircraft that is being assembled by the Tri-Motor



Heritage Foundation. Visitors to the museum can see the progress that's being made on the project. Jody Brausch, the president of the foundation and one of the many volunteers who has worked on the project, said that years of effort will be completed soon. The engines have been installed, the landing gear is in place, and almost all of the electrical work is done. Plans call for testing the engines in October. Fine-tuning of the engines will be carried out in the winter, and the first test flight should be in the spring.

Efforts to restore the plane began in 2008, and more than $2 million has been spent. The plane has passed through many hands, but from 1946 to 1952 Island Airlines flew it from Port Clinton to Put-in-Bay. For more information and to donate to aid the project, visit restoretheford.org.

Restoring the Catalina - The museum's Consolidated-Vultee PBY-6A Catalina flying boat is a flyable aircraft. After the museum bought it from Mid America Flight Museum, pilots flew it in March 2022 from Mount Pleasant, Texas, to its new home at the museum, a trip of about 884 miles. Still, the museum decided to do work on the aircraft before sending it out on the air show

circuit and offering rides on it, Patrick said. The hydraulics and the electrical system are being rebuilt. The museum hopes to test the engines in the fall and to fly the aircraft again in the spring. "We plan on giving rides," Patrick said. Although the plane is known for being able to land on the water - during World War II, it was often used to rescue American pilots - there are currently no plans to land it on Lake Erie, Patrick said.