

Lifestyles of **SEDONA**

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SEDONA RESIDENTS get an up close look at "Executive Sweet," a B-25 "Mitchell" bomber that arrived with a fleet of flying of training fighter planes at the Sedona Airport. The World War II-era bomber offers flights over the Verde Valley for young and old alike. The Sedona Airport has expanded from a single hanger in the 1950s to a small terminal and serves as a community event space for festival and events like car shows, the annual fly-in and Sedona Winefest.

Sedona Airport more than a destination

Tabletop Mountain, a mesa as flat as an aircraft carrier, had been part of the Sedona story for more than 100 years, but its evolution into a modern airport began 60 years ago, on Sept. 22, 1955, when Ray Steele made the first flight to the spot, according to Al Comello, spokesman for the Sedona Airport.

Steele and Joe Moser, two charter pilots operating out of Cottonwood had identified the mesa as a prime location for a runway and cleared enough land to get it started.

In 1957, the federal government deeded the 230 acres on the mesa and the easement for the road right-of-way to Yavapai County as a public airport, according to Dr. David Allen in his history of the airport. Later that year, a \$13,420 grant from the Civil Aeronautics Administration funded the paving of a 3,700-foot runway, along with some aircraft parking space.

The county subsequently

leased the airport to the Sedona Oak Creek Airport Authority, which still operates it.

As the city grew up around the base of the mesa, opposition grew as well. Residents decried the presence of an airport amid the heavily populated area of West Sedona. Decades later, a vocal minority continues to complain, particularly about the noise and inconvenience of helicopter tours.

Yet, the self-supporting airport has thrived — it requires no public funding from taxes, according to its website.

Income is generated from fuel sales, rental of buildings and hangars and business agreements with airport vendors, such as tour companies, the Mesa Grill restaurant and Sky Lodge Ranch.

The SOCAA is a charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code in part because it meets the criterion of "lessening the burdens of government."

"The exempt purpose of the

organization is to lessen the burden of Yavapai County government ... by providing airport facilities to a rural area not served by existing airport facilities," according to SOCAA.

It also "improves the public welfare by establishing better access between this community and the surrounding areas ... [and] provides residents with access to other locations and increases visitor traffic to the area. The increase in tourism provides support to the local economy and increased employment opportunities. The airport has also been approved by local government to work with police, fire and rescue agencies in providing health and welfare services to the community."

Community Service

The airport played a key role in the battle against last year's Slide Fire, as well as the Brins Fire before that.

Four major firefighting aircraft were based at the airport along with dozens of support

personnel and ancillary equipment used against the Slide Fire. Working with incident managers and personnel, SOCAA made available 12 acres of the airport's operating area for firefighting operations, according to the airport's website.

At the fire's peak, three Sikorsky Air-Crane helicopters and Colombia Helicopter's Model 234 Chinook were fighting the fire throughout the day, dumping water on key hot spots, each flying half a dozen trips per day. The short return flight to the airport to refuel was a significant advantage for the airborne attack on the fire.

Airport Ambassadors

Thousands of visitors and locals congregate at the Airport Mesa overlook marvelling at the almost bird's-eye view of Sedona's red rock vistas and gazing down the length of the Verde Valley toward each day's sunset.

Airport ambassadors are there

to greet them, answer questions and make recommendations for enjoying the Sedona experience

The ambassadors program was started in 2007, and employs two or three part-time staffers who cover the overlook, particularly at sunset.

The service is free but generates enough tips to cover payroll, with funds leftover.

While most are tourists, locals stop in when they have friends or relatives visiting or if they haven't been there in years.

The ambassadors also maintain the overlook's kiosk, which offers flyers for airport businesses and has to be replenished often.

B-25 Bomber

Sedonans and visitors flock to the Sedona Airport whenever historic bomber planes such as the B-25 "Mitchell" touch down there for a show.

Throughout the day, in addition to getting an inside peek of

the bomber, aviation and history enthusiasts can purchase a ticket to go up in the warbird.

The bombers are flown by a group of volunteers to share the history of the bomber and spark interest in young people in both aviation and military history.

This year's show in March helped support Marine Corps League charities and recruit new members to the group.

Sedona Winefest

A fall tradition in the city, Sedona Winefest has grown like a well-tended grapevine, reflecting the wine industry's rise in the Verde Valley.

It's an opportunity to sample many Arizona wines from the Verde Valley and Southern Arizona, while enjoying the beautiful vistas, music in the shaded courtyard seating areas and a wide variety of vendors offering goods and services.

In addition, there are fine

foods in the form of small bites from local chefs and an exclusive art exhibit.

Sedona Winefest also offers an educational area where highly respected experts from the wine industry will give short seminars, sharing their expertise on everything from how to truly appreciate wine to the elements of winemaking and the importance of vineyard climate and location.

Airport Day

SOCAA will hold its annual Airport Day on Saturday, Sept. 19, with a variety of aircraft on display and a local and statewide classic car show.

The airport hosts the event showcasing cool aircraft — from old military, antiques and restored to modern, state-of-the-art aircraft with full glass cockpits. Attendees can talk with pilots and enjoy visiting with aviation enthusiasts from

all walks of life and aviation experiences.

Master Plan

The Sedona-Oak Creek Airport Authority is in the process of updating its 20-year master plan, which will guide operations and potential development of the facility.

"This orderly process of evaluation looks at the whole picture of aviation, Sedona Airport as a facility and projects what needs to be addressed to continue to provide quality aviation services for this area of Arizona," General Manager Russell Widmar said. "We believe the majority of Sedonans understand the intrinsic value Sedona Airport brings to the community, its economy and national transportation system at large."

Residents can go to sedonaairport.org for basic information on the plan and updates as the process continues.

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