

## ***Planes of Fame Kicks Off Central Coast AirFest and Announces Construction Progress on Santa Maria Museum Campus***

**Santa Maria, CA – June 6, 2025** – On Thursday afternoon at the Central Coast Jet Center, the **Planes of Fame Air Museum** brought together community members, aviation enthusiasts, and supporters to celebrate the upcoming **Central Coast AirFest 2025, scheduled for October 18 & 19, 2025**, and share exciting updates on the construction of its new campus at the Santa Maria Airport.

The event, hosted by **Chris Kunkle** of Central Coast Jet Center, featured an outstanding BBQ thanks to the generosity of **Mark and Taylor English** and their team of dedicated volunteers.

Museum Director **Jane Hinton**, who is leading the development of the **Planes of Fame Central Coast Campus**, welcomed guests and gave an inspiring address detailing the Museum's vision for the future and this fall's major airshow.

This year's **Central Coast AirFest**, produced by the Planes of Fame Air Museum and presented by the Santa Maria Airport, promises to be a spectacular aviation showcase. Attendees can expect thrilling performances from the **USAF F-35 Demonstration Team**, the **U.S. Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet Demo Team**, and more than a dozen historic **warbirds in flight**.

A special highlight of this year's AirFest is the **22nd Annual National Aviation Heritage Invitational (NAHI)**, a prestigious **vintage aircraft competition** making its Central Coast debut. Formerly held at the Reno Air Races, NAHI is held in partnership with the **Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum** and brings together meticulously restored aircraft from around the nation. These aircraft are judged on their historical authenticity, craftsmanship, and presentation—making the competition a perfect fit for the AirFest and the mission of Planes of Fame.

Several historic aircraft were in attendance at the kickoff event, including the Museum's **Curtiss P-40 Warhawk**, a rare **Lockheed 12 Electra Junior** featuring **Allan Hancock College** nose art, and a pair of **Northrop F-5 Tigers**.

The **P-40** holds a special significance on the Central Coast. During World War II, P-40s were among the aircraft flown out of nearby training bases, including **Santa Maria Army Air Field**, helping prepare pilots for service in the Pacific Theater. Showcasing this aircraft honors the region's critical role in wartime aviation training and history.

The **Lockheed 12** on display featured special nose art honoring **Allan Hancock College**, a longtime local educational institution with deep ties to aviation. The college originated as Allan Hancock Field, a flight training school that trained thousands of cadets during WWII. Today, the college remains an important community hub and aviation partner.

Hinton also shared updates on the construction of the Museum's **new 23-acre campus**, now underway adjacent to the Radisson Hotel at the Santa Maria Airport. **Phase One**, known as **Building Alpha**, will include a **WWII Aircraft Display Hangar**, an **Educational Center**, and an **Aircraft Restoration Facility**, totaling 56,000 square feet and representing a \$12 million investment in the region.

"We're excited to report that the groundwork and excavation are complete," said Hinton. "We're now preparing the site for foundation work, and steel framing will begin in the coming months. By the time AirFest arrives, the public will see a structure rising—a visible sign of the future of aviation history and education right here in Santa Maria."

Beyond the physical build, Planes of Fame is developing **STEM-based educational programming, interpretive exhibits, and immersive experiences** for students, families, and visitors. Planning is also underway for **Building Bravo** and **Phase Two** of the campus.

To engage the community, the Museum is launching several initiatives:

- **Commemorative Bricks** will be available soon and installed in front of the museum's main entrance—an opportunity for individuals and families to leave a lasting legacy.
- **Naming Opportunities** are open for exhibits, education programs, and key features of the museum.
- A new **local membership program** will launch this fall, with exclusive benefits for early supporters who want to shape the museum's future.

"Our museum isn't just about aircraft—it's about people," said Hinton. "Our donors and members make it possible to educate students, honor veterans, and preserve aviation history for future generations. We invite everyone to become part of this next chapter."

For more information about the Planes of Fame Central Coast Campus, visit [www.pofsantamaria.org](http://www.pofsantamaria.org).

To purchase tickets to **Central Coast AirFest** or learn more about **sponsorship opportunities**, visit [www.centralcoastairfest.com](http://www.centralcoastairfest.com).

#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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