



AERO MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to pull that little red handle. Nathan did.



Tom Lemanski teaching our afternoon Private Pilot Ground School.

Michael Payne, Director
Port Townsend Aero Museum

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Port Townsend Aero Museum Summer Newsletter 2025

Long sunny days and warm temperatures at the Port Townsend Aero Museum are a sure indicator that the time is right for our Summer Newsletter. In this letter I'll do my best to bring you up to date on what has been happening at the aero museum over these last 12 months.

It is hard to believe, but 2025 marks the 24th anniversary of the Port Townsend Aero Museum, a 501(c)3 publicly owned non-profit organization. What Jerry and Peggy Thuotte started in a 50' by 60' private hangar in 2001 has since grown into a world class aviation museum encompassing over 36,000 square feet of displayed aircraft, aviation artwork, and aviation related education space for our youth volunteers. From the beginning, this museum has been centered around youth education and mentorship programs giving teenagers the opportunity to learn and grow into responsible

young adults through real-world work experience involving aviation. Our young volunteers range from thirteen to eighteen years old, and each has committed to volunteering one day a week at the museum throughout the year. These volunteers learn everything from running the retail business of a large museum open to the public, to working on and restoring antique aircraft while working together as a team. In addition, each volunteer is given the chance to earn their Private Pilots License at no charge to their families. It really is a fantastic program and opportunity!

Our youth program is currently at capacity with seventeen youth volunteers showing up at least once a week on the scheduled day of their choosing. In addition, we have a waiting list of individuals who have interviewed and are waiting for a volunteer spot to open. I'm often



Fourteen year old Anora learning the art of TIG welding.



At thirteen Frankie is putting the shine back into this Swift!



Sam and Montana hard at work setting up our new aviation book sales area.



The museum's trusty Green Machine doing what it does best!

asked "with so many on the waitlist, why don't we increase the number of active youth volunteers?". The reason I limit the number of volunteers to seventeen has to do with the FAA required supervision of the aircraft restoration and repair work we do on both museum and customer owned aircraft. Working with our young volunteers on aircraft requires supervision by someone licensed by the FAA who is qualified to accomplish whatever the job might happen to be. In the past twenty four years we've had over 400 young people volunteer at the museum. Nearly all of these volunteers have gone on to successful careers, including many of them becoming professional pilots and aeronautical engineers! In fact, this coming Fall Semester there will be four Port Townsend Aero Museum volunteers enrolled in engineering programs at the University of Washington, including **Gavin and Gabriel Minor, Ameila Sinopole, and Noah Lawrence**, and I should mention that each of them is a licensed Private Pilot!

Our flight training program has been busy as ever with two young individuals already earning their Private Pilot Licenses this year. In January, shortly after his seventeenth birthday, **Ian Eisenman** passed his PPL check ride to become the first volunteer to be licensed as a private pilot in 2025. A

couple of months later in April, **Ben Mello** turned seventeen and passed his FAA check ride, earning him his Private Pilot License. Now both Ben and Ian are working on getting their tailwheel endorsement so they can then help with the flying duties of keeping our fleet of antique aircraft flying. As a reward for their hard work, both Ben and Ian were each awarded a \$450 Kenmore Air scholarship from the Port Townsend Aero Museum that they can apply towards earning their float plane rating. Following in the footsteps of our newly licensed pilots are sixteen-year-old **Ivan Miller** who recently soloed our Cessna 172 and is now starting his cross country training, and sixteen-year-old **Elise Ligon** who passed her FAA written exam and is on the cusp of taking her first solo flight. I've only mentioned four of our young volunteers, but please remember there are thirteen more young people coming up right behind them in our flight training program. Having this many kids learning to fly is only possible through the work and dedication of our flight instructors including **Jeff Beres, Ryan Georgi, Seth Mulhausen, Jake Kirschbaum**, and through our ground school instructors **Tom Lemanski** and **Renee Covill**. Jeff is our only paid instructor and he flight instructs every Saturday and as needed on other days by



A custom built pedal car sitting proudly next to our 1949 CallAir A2



Anora wondering how she'll see anything from the back seat when she solos the Cub.



Ben Mello installing the front panel on a customer's N3N biplane.

prior arrangement. The rest of our flight and ground school instruction comes in the form of time volunteered by the exceptional individuals listed above, Ryan, Seth, Jake, Tom, and Renee.

The stories and accomplishments of these volunteers underline just how transformative the museum's programs have become, not only shaping future aviators and engineers, but also fostering confidence, responsibility, and a deep appreciation for aviation. Our alumni frequently return to share their experiences and offer guidance to new volunteers, giving our new members a sense of community and continuity that sets the Port Townsend Aero Museum apart from other museums.

2025 brought with it a significant increase in our collection of significant aircraft and aircraft projects thanks to the generosity and support of several individuals in our local aviation community. **Olde Thyme Aviation**, one of the very first contributors to the Port Townsend Aero Museum back when the museum was only a concept, recently donated a 1942 Stinson Vultee V77 project, a 1936 Cabin Waco YQC-6 biplane project, and a 1929 Travel Air 4000 project, all very nice and very complete. In April, the aero museum was honored to receive

a fully restored 1932 Fleet Model 7 biplane from **Mitch Meany** from Thun Field in Puyallup WA. Mitch is the same gentleman from whom the aero museum purchased our 1951 Cessna 195 last year. It was during the museum's purchase of his Cessna that Mitch decided he liked what he saw of the aero museum operation involving kids and aircraft, and as a result one year later he donated his beautiful Fleet biplane to the Port Townsend Aero Museum! The Fleet 7 now sits proudly alongside our other aircraft on display in the main building. We also received a very nice 1946 Aeronca 7AC Champ donation from long-time Port Townsend Pilot and museum volunteer **Joe Platt**. Since we already have a 7AC in



Joe Platt with Anora and Soren as he donates his beloved Aeronca 7AC to PTAM.

our collection, we'll be using Joe's aircraft for instruction in the restoration shop and then offer it for sale as a fundraiser for our program. Finally, out of Snohomish, we received a very nice Piper Bushmaster, a four-place experimental seaplane, that was built by the donor's father back in the 1990s. How we will best use the Bushmaster to help move the aero museum into a healthy future is still to be determined. One thing is for sure, and that is all of us at the museum owe a huge thank you to the donors of these antique and classic aircraft.

Last August 3rd the Port Townsend Aero Museum was open to the public with free admission as part of the Port of Port Townsend Airport Day 100 Year Centennial celebration. With over one thousand visitors showing up for the event, it was a great success in terms of bringing positive public awareness to the airport and to the aero museum. This year the **Port Townsend Airport Day** event is planned for Saturday **August 2nd**, and it should be even better than last with more aircraft and classic cars on display, twice as many food vendors, live music, and a host of other activities, all located on the airport ramp on the south side of the aero museum. The following week is the **Diamond Point Airport Appreciation Day**, scheduled for



Our newest addition after receiving a full youth volunteer detail, a 1932 Fleet 7.

August 9th, and at the end of the month we'll be attending the Sequim Valley Air Affaire, scheduled for August 30th. As in years past, it will be our young pilots flying many of our antique aircraft to these other events for the public to enjoy!

This July we had to say goodbye to one of our long-term volunteers who in recent years was a paid employee of the Port Townsend Aero Museum. **Harrison Shinohara** started volunteering at the aero museum as a sixteen-year-old young man, working hard to earn his Pilot's license before attending Montana State and Central Washington Universities where he earned a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Wanting to put his four years of engineering education into practice, Harrison accepted an offer from a small engineering company in Ballard where he'll specialize in non-destructive testing of the miles and miles of piping found within the refinery industry. He'll be working across the globe, and we truly do wish him the best. This fall we will also be saying goodbye to my office assistant **Linda Lemanski**. Linda, the wife of our ground school instructor Tom, has worked part-time in the museum administration office for two years and has become a master of keeping things organized and streamlined, with an eye to

always improving our system. Fortunately, before Linda bails out of the museum office she'll be sitting in the right seat through the month of August and giving dual instruction to her replacement, **Sue Nelson**. Sue recently retired from the Port of Port Townsend after many years of helping to run a very successful Port office. We are excited to have her working at the Port Townsend Aero Museum, and to have her back at the Jefferson County Airport where she once worked over 30 years ago for Port Townsend Airways!

With Harrison leaving, the aero museum has just two full-time employees, **Kevin Vogel** and myself. Kevin and I are both A&P IA aircraft mechanics who among other things work to keep the museum aircraft flying with the help of our volunteers, while managing a full schedule of customer restoration and maintenance work that we perform on privately owned aircraft. The income our contract work generates helps to pay employee wages, while providing learning opportunities for our young volunteers as they work alongside us in the restoration shop. During the work week, when the young volunteers are back in school, the aero museum is run by an excellent staff of adult volunteers, each of whom are among some of the most interesting



Frankie and Elliot after returning from a ride Keller Wattum's new R66!



Elise and Frankie thrying out the de Havilland Chipmunk.



Flight Instructor Jeff Beres shakes Ivan's hand after a very nice first solo flight by Ivan.



Anora and Owen making a template on this UPF-7 Waco biplane.



Ben and Elliot removing old aircraft fabric from a Piper PA18 wing.



Elise thirty feet up in the boom lift as we get prepare to hang our Skybolt biplane.

people you could ever hope to meet, and all with a shared passion for aviation.

With all this talk of volunteers, flight lessons, antique aircraft, employees, and a large facility, it has reminded me of one very important item I've yet to cover in this newsletter. And that is the expense of operating an aviation program that is unique among aviation museums in this country. The Port Townsend Aero Museum has become a world class aviation museum with a youth in aviation education program that is second to none and with each passing year we are growing in terms of membership, aircraft, volunteers, and notoriety. But without your support, we simply will not be able to continue down the path that was set so many years ago by two retired United Airline employees who had a dream of helping kids through the experience of aviation. No donation should be considered too small, or too large. We also accept material donations, for display, or to offer for sale to raise funding. Either way, monetary or material, we need your support to ensure the future of the aero museum. Please help if you can. All donations are tax deductible.

Wishing each of you a wonderful summer season,

Sincerely,

Mike

Michael Payne
Director



Owen tries on the museum Rose Parakeet for size. He tells me was a good fit!



Here we see 17 year old Ian Eisenman who just earned his Private Pilot License in January of this year!



Sebastian prepping this Staggerwing for new wingwalk material.



Liam, Ian, Owen and Nathan did an excellent job of hanging our Wright Flyer Rib display.



Frankie and Anora scrubbing clean the PTAM highway sign.



Ivan, Miles, Anora, and Owen checking the compression on a Piper L4.



Be sure to visit our new expansion, made possible by the Hanson Family Foundation

Learn more about PTAM at ptaeromuseum.com
 Open 9-4 Wednesday through Sunday.
 Closed Thanksgiving & Christmas Day

Membership Program

Individual	\$35.00 (annual)
Family	\$50.00 (annual)
Supporter	\$250.00 (annual)
Sponsor	\$500.00 (annual)
Patron	\$1000.00 (lifetime membership)
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Thanks for your donation!



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