

AIRPORT: Long history of aviation in Sisters Country

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cross-winds, were closed.

On July 6, 1978, the airport was deleted from State ownership and control when it went into ownership and control of Brooks Resources Corporation and the name changed officially to "Sisters Airport."

Then, in 1982 our wonderful Sisters resident Cliff Clemens got into the picture by purchasing the airport, the Indian Ford runway easement from Brooks Resources, along with another portion of the runway easement from the Arpkes in 1985.

Over the years, homeowners adjacent to the runway have used the airport for their personal and business comings and goings. One of the homeowners, Vern Goodsell, aircraft builder and rebuilder, used the airport for his business. He built a replica World War II Spitfire from the ground up in his shop, and the aircraft is still thrilling spectators today in air shows around the U.S.

When Cliff went out among the stars in 2008, his sons Dave and Doug inherited the whole shebang, but not being aviators, they went looking for a buyer and guess what, the present owners, the Benson family, got into the picture.

But they weren't Eagle Air at the time, they were a growing environmental business, ENERGYneering Solutions, operating out of a spare bedroom of Julie and Benny Benson's home. It took some time, and a lot of: "You bet," and "Awh, I don't know," but in 2011 "You betcha!" came out on top and the Bensons became owners of the Sisters Airport.

In 2013, the Bensons repaved the runway and

hosted a grand opening of the new runway, new hangars, offices and refueling equipment at their first July 4th Fly-in. At this time they announced the Flight Science program starting at Sisters High School. In 2014 the Bensons facilitated the annexation of the airport into the City of Sisters with unanimous county and city approval after 7 public hearings.

Dorro Sokol, who recently went out among the stars, flew her Twin Bonanza to and from the airport for many years. In the 1970s a glider operation was hopping rides and giving flight instruction at the airport. Dorro's daughter, Cris Converse, was a student at that time. One day she and her instructor took an aerial tow off the airport in a two-place sailplane, released from the tow plane and soared non-stop to Brothers and back in a 4-1/2 hour flight.

(The airport will host a memorial gathering for Dorro in July of this year; the date to be announced soon.)

Today, the Sisters Airport is the venue for flight instruction in conventional single-engine aircraft, tail-draggers, instrument training and helicopters. Sisters High School has the FAA-qualified Flight Science flying course going full-bore, and soon there will be a glider operating from Sisters as part of training the SHS flight students. There is a parachute jumping operation going in summer, and if we have any forest or range wildfires in the future we can expect the airport to be very busy with the aerial arm of firefighting.

In time, the only privately owned fixed-base operation in Oregon, Sisters Eagle Airport would like to see the airport become a leading center for all types of flight operations, and the facility to look like the artist's rendition of the future.

Retirement proposal under fire

PORTLAND (AP) — Public employees and union leaders are criticizing proposals to reduce benefits in order to help fund Oregon's public pension system.

Workers on Monday spoke to members of the Senate Workforce Committee, asking the lawmakers not to "raid" the retirement plans of newer employees in order to pay off a \$22 billion deficit attributed in part to generous and unfunded benefits promised to retirees, *The Oregonian/OregonLive* reported.

"I think it's immoral that there are some that want to reduce the retirement benefits of people like me," said Barbara Walsh, who has worked as an office specialist for the Child Welfare office in Medford for five years. "It's immoral and, frankly, insulting. What we do is essential for our community. The

private sector isn't going to take care of these vulnerable children."

The workers called on the Legislature to instead raise business taxes to pay for the unfunded pension system.

Committee Vice Chair Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, has proposed two reform bills to deal with the pension troubles. One would redirect employees' contributions to support the pension fund, rather than supplemental retirement accounts. The other would redefine the final salary used to calculate a member's benefits from a three-year average to five, which will tend to lower employee benefits.

Knopp said he is pushing hard for a reform to the public employee retirement system to avoid a collapse of the system.

"It may not happen next year, but in three or four bienniums from now, the rates are

going to be double what they are today," he said. "Our local districts and state agencies and school districts are already having trouble paying the PERS costs they have today."

Nevertheless, public employees focused on the fairness of reducing benefits for newer public employees who already have smaller benefits packages than their predecessors.

Melissa Unger, a lobbyist for the Service Employees International Union Local 503, said that Knopp's proposals could cut retirement benefits for new employees by as much as 40 percent.

Unger urged lawmakers to "do the right thing and reject these proposals that are illegal, unfair, and extreme, break the contracts you made with public workers and create other problems of either reduced services or increased costs."

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