

Smokey jumper museum group unhappy with JoCo café ruling

Frustration and disappointment are expressed by a group that planned a smoke-jumper museum and other attractions at Illinois Valley Airport.

In a statement Monday, Jan. 14, the group stated, “After 18 months of negotiation, the Josephine County Airports Manager, Alex Grossi, has rejected the proposal by a local nonprofit group to convert the (former) Siskiyou Smokejumper Base into a cultural heritage tourism resource.

“The objectives of the group were to develop the site to attract and retain tourism spending in S.W. Oregon and retain a cultural heritage story that would convey a positive community image.”

The group notes that the base was the first aerial fire-fighting operation in Oregon. It is now the last of the original four smokejumping bases in U.S. history still standing. One of the buildings is the oldest smokejumper parachute loft in the nation.

Further, pointed out the museum group, “The base also gives S.W. Oregon a connection to the Apollo missions to the moon. One of the smokejumpers who worked here in 1953, Stuart Roosa , became the command pilot of Apollo 14. His experiences as a smokejumper prompted him to carry tree seeds with him to the moon.

“These seeds were planted after the mission returned, and were distributed during 1976 to commemorate the U.S. bicentennial. Some

Oregon gets ethanol fuel

Motorists who fill up with gasoline in Oregon are putting in a blended fuel that is 10 percent ethanol as part of a mandated, phased implementation of the state’s renewable fuel standard.

Nine counties in Northwest Oregon are the first to fall under the requirement that began Tuesday, Jan 15. The rest of the state will follow in stages.

By the middle of September, every licensed gas station in Oregon will offer the ethanol-blended fuel as required. For now, owners of those stations and the inspectors who will ensure compliance are getting ready for the change in hopes that motorists don’t experience problems with their vehicles.

“We have sent notices to all facilities with licensed gasoline meters listing the regions and dates for implementation,” says Russ Wyckoff, administrator of the Oregon Department of Agriculture’s Measurement Standards Division, whose inspectors check motor fuel quantity and quality on a routine basis.

“We have also notified those licensees on steps to take to prepare gasoline storage tanks for the switch to the ethanol-blended product.”

House Bill 2210, also

of these trees were distributed around the world to commemorate the American space program.

“The Siskiyou Smokejumper Base is home of the moon trees, and advocates for the historic base believe that a story like this can call international attention to S.W. Oregon, a factor they believe will make Oregon more competitive in the global tourism market.”

The original moon tree planted at the base by Roosa in 1976 died from lack of care when the county took charge of the airfield in 1987. However, the nonprofit group was contacted last year by a family who has a moon tree and wants to donate it to the museum project.

The donor will be a high school student from Coos Bay, Roosa’s adopted hometown. In 2002, the student entered and won a NASA-sponsored, national writing contest with a story about moon trees.

A moon tree dedication event is planned for Arbor Day in April, and advocates of the base strongly believe this could be the premiere Arbor Day event in the nation.

The coming event was also used by the group to attract special educational opportunities for Cave Junction schools by NASA and Pine Mountain Observatory. “The moon tree was a powerful tool to leverage these programs, and there were efforts to continue this for other schools in the region,” said the museum project group.

The group also planned to use the historic significance of the base to attract grants for other educational opportunities in aviation and aerospace, and other educational programs for youth. The group added:

“The airport manager’s rejection of the heritage proposal puts the moon tree dedication at risk of cancellation. The group does not expect to get a nationally significant promotional opportunity like this again.

“The Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum Project (SSBMP), a nonprofit group in Cave Junction, has been working with the county to establish an agreement and authority to proceed with the work to get the base set up as a tourism resource. The group first proposed the project in August 2006 and produced a business plan, interpretive plan, and financial plan in October the same year.

“To this date, the group has collected more than 2,000 historic photos and conducted several interviews in preparation of telling the story to the public.”

The central part of the heritage proposal was the historic smokejumper mess hall where the group planned to set up a small deli-style grocery store, museum and information center to tell the public about other area attractions.

“The airport manager has decided to rent the historic smokejumper mess hall to a private group who wants to open a restaurant,” said the museum backers. “There have been many attempts to operate a restaurant in the building since 1987, and all have failed.

“The restaurant had been vacant for two years when

SSBMP proposed converting the base into a heritage tourism site. The group is uncertain why the airport manager would throw away a heritage tourism icon to go back to the same old thing that has repeatedly resulted in failure and brought nothing to the economy of the county.”

SSBMP continued, “The airport manager explained in his Jan. 8 rejection letter that we had not been responsive since receiving a proposed lease agreement from the county in August 2007, a full year after the group had first proposed the project. The counterproposal had been returned to the commissioners in late September, according to Gary Buck, our president.

“The reason for the delay was related to action by the airport manager, who had removed parking at the historic base for vehicle and airplanes when the agreement was sent to the group.

“These parking areas were a central part of the group’s business and interpretive plan to attract and accommodate the parking needs of families who travel in private airplanes, tour buses, RVs, school buses and approximately 5 percent of the

traffic on Hwy. 199; some 15,000 vehicles per year.

“The parking areas that were closed,” said SSBMP, “had been in use for more than 50 years. The result of these closures leaves the airport with no legal place for visiting aircraft to park and no place for tour or school buses and RVs to park or turn around.

“Since the closures were made, the group has been talking with the commissioners about resolutions for returning the parking, which could be easily accomplished with standard FAA waivers and variances or by returning the airfield to its original designation as a light aviation airport.

“The group has been very active with trying to get these problems resolved, which are essential to using the smokejumper and moon tree stories to attract tourism spending to the region and benefit the local community.

“There were other benefits the base was going to bring to the community in the form of grants and volunteer assistance from the community. They were to help with coordination of airport events, provide airport security, and develop promotional media

that could have helped to bring more tourism spending to businesses in all of southwest Oregon.”

In conclusion, SSBMP stated, “In the 20 years that the county has owned the airport property, the closest it has ever come to establishing a significant money-making operation at this field is the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum Project.”

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MONDAY, JAN. 21

*Daily Favorites

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TUESDAY, JAN. 22

*Daily Favorites

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