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Taylor/Piper Cub monument dedicated Saturday at Pitt-Bradford

By: MARCIE SCHELLHAMMER Era Reporter

"From these small Bradford beginnings evolved two of the greatest American light planes: the Taylorcraft and the Piper Cub," reads the Taylor/Piper Cub Factory Monument, which was dedicated Saturday at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford.

The monument stands in front of Blaisdell Hall - the site of the original factory where the plane now known as the Piper Cub was built. The university campus was the site of the Harri Emery Airport, named after the Bradford native and aviation pioneer who took part in the process of bringing the Taylor Factory to Bradford in 1928.

It was standing room only at the dedication ceremony Saturday, where Pitt-Bradford President Dr. Livingston Alexander said the event was to "reclaim an important aspect of the heritage of this region."

"This area should be known not only for its oil and gas and bountiful forests and Zippo and Case products, but for its rich history in aviation," he said.

Bradford native Dr. Tom Spencer, the keynote speaker at the event and son of the late Mary Alice Spencer, spoke of his mother's career with the Taylor/Piper aircraft factory.

"Taylor/Piper Aircraft Corp. was a very important part of my family's life," Spencer said.

"I can remember 50 years ago driving out here to the Harri Emery airfield on hot summer evenings," Spencer said, explaining his mother would tell stories of when she worked for William Piper and Gilbert Taylor. "I came away with the impression this was a very special place in the 1930s."

Everyone loved being part of the aviation industry then, he said, adding they were part of something "new and unique - adventurous, romantic and dangerous. You could tell for them it was something magical."

His mother became a pilot, Spencer said, explaining Taylor and Piper encouraged all of their employees to fly. His mother, Piper's secretary, also became an advertising tool for the company - "the Cub was so safe and affordable that even a woman could fly it!" Spencer said, laughing.

However, his mother did not pursue her love of aviation as a huge step forward for women's rights - "she certainly knew she was doing something out of the ordinary ... she simply loved to fly."

Also speaking at the ceremony were Bruce Perry and Terry Palmer, co-chairmen of the committee to erect the monument. Perry described the erection of the monument was 10 years in the making.

A pilot named George Welsch from North Carolina, who had learned how to fly in a Piper cub, approached Pitt-Bradford about memorializing the site where the Cub was born, Perry said.

Funds were raised for the project, but the site of the factory was the planned area for Blaisdell Hall. The project was on the backburner for a while, until Perry and Palmer took it up again.

"Sometimes I wonder why we need another monument," Palmer said, explaining there are monuments in place all over the country. "We're here today to honor men and women with dreams ... dreams of flight. Thank you for your interest in Bradford and in Taylor/Piper."

As part of the events on Saturday, Sally Costik and Bruce Perry gave historical lectures on the Harri Emery and the Emery family and on the Taylor/Piper factory, respectively.

Also present were descendants of the Piper family, including William T. Piper Jr., who helped to unveil the monument with the assistance of Alexander, Perry and Palmer.

Plans for a skydiving demonstration and radio-controlled plane demonstration were called off because of strong winds.

An exhibit on "Bradford's Link to Aviation History" is being shown in the KOA Art Gallery in Blaisdell Hall until July 17. Among the exhibits are photos of Harri Emery and his family, his Bradford home, the Harri Emery Airport and of the Taylor/Piper factory.

A history of the factory and of the famous E2, which ultimately became known as the Piper Cub, are also presented.