



**LAURAN PAINE JR.**  
COMMENTARY / PLANE TALK



*1936 Stinson Reliant with a 1935 Packard Model Twelve Coupe Convertible. As I walked by, the airplane's donor was removing the prop governor. He said, "It was acting up a little when I flew it in here. I wanna get it fixed." I said, "At least you know your airplane is in a good home." He said, "They're wonderful people here. Just wonderful."*

## A Living Museum

The Western Antique Aeroplane and Automobile Museum

BY LAURAN PAINE JR.

**THIS COLUMN BEGAN WITH** a reader being in disbelief. Seems Fran Gibbons was on a Columbia River boat cruise, and the boat docked at the town of Hood River, Oregon. Passengers were given several options of places to visit. One of those options was the Western Antique Aeroplane and Automobile Museum (WAAAM). Fran, being an Air Force veteran, chose the WAAAM. There he was both awestruck and amazed. As he wandered the museum he kept muttering, "Why have I never heard of this place? It's absolutely amazing!" So Fran wrote Mac McClellan at the EAA, and Mac wrote me asking, "This is in your part of the country, ever heard of this place?" I replied, "Oh, yeah. Been there. It's incredible." And thus this column was born.

Probably one reason Fran never heard of the place is because it's located in Hood River, not exactly a population center, nestled as it is in a bend of the Columbia River. Basically, the museum is there because the founder lives there; home is where the heart is, so Hood River is where the museum is. Still, the museum has grown by leaps

and bounds. Why? Well, I'm gonna tell you about that. As I do, keep in mind a couple things: the founder's passion for old airplanes and the enthusiasm and friendliness of all whom you meet there. There are a lot of fine museums out there, but this one is alive—everything in it runs—thus it easily takes you to another time, a time of experimentation, romance, and can-do, to aviation's golden age.

A word about the founder (who shuns the limelight, by the way): Terry Brandt. Terry grew up on an almond farm in central California. His father, Dick, was also a pilot so there were always airplanes around and a hangar to hang out in. Terry gravitated to all that; the "aviation imprint" was set at an

early age. But first there was farming to do. Harvesting almonds was fairly labor-intensive, so Dick set about tinkering with a better way to do it. He came up with a machine to shake the trees such that the almonds would fall to the ground. And then he obtained a patent for the tree shaker. But Dick was interested in farming; manufacturing machinery, not so much. It was Terry who took up that slack and made a business out of it, building and marketing the Shock Wave Shaker. And, as happens when you have a good idea and work hard, he made money. What did he do with it? He gravitated to his youthful passion and, over a span of some 50 years, bought old airplanes. And then he set about to share that passion, forming, in 2006, the WAAAM as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundation. In the board's bylaws it is stated that the WAAAM is not to accept public money, and assets are not to be liquidated. And Terry is proud of that: This museum is run by the people and for the people, and he wants to keep it that way.

Terry then built a large hangar and opened the WAAAM in 2007 with 42 airplanes and 20 cars. (Others convinced him that the cars would add to the appeal of the museum, and they were right!) Cutting quickly to the chase, a second hangar was built in 2009 and a third in 2013 and—get this—there are now more than 275 airplanes, automobiles, motorcycles, jeeps, and tractors. People who like old airplanes like other old things, too! The thing that grabs you immediately about the museum is that it just seems so alive. It doesn't just look good in there, it *smells* good, with the oil and all, like a living hangar should. Therein, to me, lies a lot of the WAAAM's magic: It's a place you *feel*!

Now I want you to meet Judy. Judy is the current museum director, and she is a hoot! She happens to be Terry's sister, so she also grew up with a passion for airplanes. I flew to the Ken Jernstedt Airfield (4S2) in Hood River on the day of my visit, and Judy drove up as I parked. I rolled the canopy back and said, "You must be Judy." She said, "And you must be Luran." And so we met. Judy ran an FBO at McMinnville airport (home of the Spruce Goose at the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum) for many years and also served as airport manager. She also towed gliders for many of those years. She came right out and said, "I'm 73 and still towing gliders," pointing across the runway to a parked Pawnee. Well, alrighty then! These people live the flying life! It's kinda like the 1920s navigation beacon that's in the front of the museum: Terry is the foundation, and Judy is the beacon. But, of course, there's more. Judy's daughter is married to Ben, who I served with in the National Guard. He does a lot of the flying of the museum's airplanes. The aviation world is indeed a small one.

The museum itself, of course, lights Judy up, but something else lights her up, too: the volunteers. She waxes poetic about them, "Couldn't do it without them. They are amazing, and they continue to amaze me every day." They're friendly, and they're enthusiastic; when you walk in the door, you *will* be greeted. One of Judy's pet peeves in life was FBOs that weren't friendly.

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You know the kind: You walk in shyly, wanting to learn to fly, and no one so much as raises their head to speak to you. That kind. (That scenario was always one of my pet peeves, too.) But that sort of thing didn't happen at Judy's FBO, and it doesn't happen at the WAAAM. If we are to keep aviation alive, we must be welcoming. Take a lesson, you smug places: The WAAAM is welcoming, and it is successful.

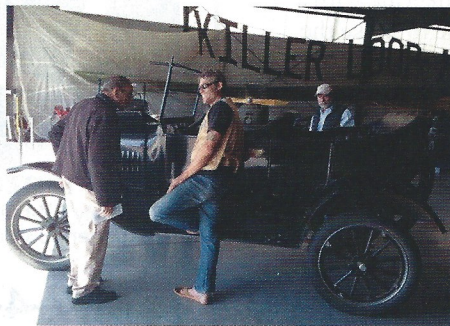
As you enter the museum, to your left, hanging from the ceiling over the gift shop, is a replica 1912 Curtiss Pusher. It was built in 1947. In 1995, Tom Murphy, the WAAAM's former restoration director, flew it from the top of the Multnomah building in Portland, Oregon. Why? To re-enact Silas Christofferson's flight from the same rooftop in 1912. See what I mean? These people talk the talk and walk the walk.

Time to tour. Touring with Judy is an added treat. She knows some background story about nearly every exhibit in the museum! And she is quick to point out the generosity of donors. Everything is donated, from the chairs you sit on to the artwork on the walls to the books in the library to, well, everything! Why? For a lot of reasons, but one of the main ones is that people want their precious stuff to go to a good home—and the WAAAM is a good home. Another thing of note I really like is that displayed with an airplane will often be a car from the same era. It lends a nice perspective to your journey back in time. When I settled in to do this column I told Mac, "It's a very visual place." He said, "We'll give you room for more pictures." So here we go, with the story in pictures. Know that we're just scratching the surface here, but it'll serve to give you some of the flavor of the place.

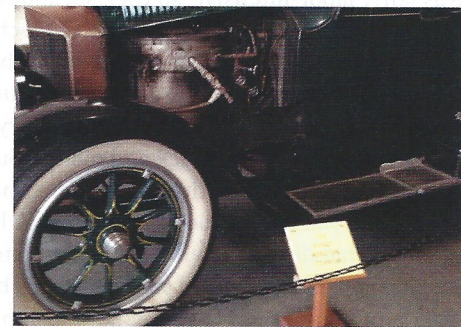
Okay, that's the quick tour. I say again, we've barely scratched the surface. There are 250 more things to see and experience. But you get the idea: The WAAAM is a special place.

While I was walking around the museum with Judy, a visitor approached her and said, "I don't see any Dodge Power Wagons." Judy replied, "Do you have one?" He said, "Yes." She said, "Let's talk." And that is how the museum grows. I saw it with my own eyes!

THE STORY IN PICTURES



Model T school. You learn how to put it together, maintain it, operate it, and drive it. Now that sounds like fun!



A Stanley Steamer. Now that's a different look under the hood! And, yes, it runs.



1931 Waco RNF with matching pedal plane. Cute! Oftentimes a visitor will see a display and offer to add to it by building and/or donating something, in this case a matching pedal plane.



1929 Stearman M-2 Speedmail (commonly called a "Bull Stearman") along with a 1929 Studebaker Commander 6. Two different machines, same era.



Jay and Tim in the restoration shop. See those smiles? Those guys are in their happy place, and boy howdy, do they ever work wonders!

THE STORY IN PICTURES



One of many shelves where Jay and Tim get their inspiration—and parts.



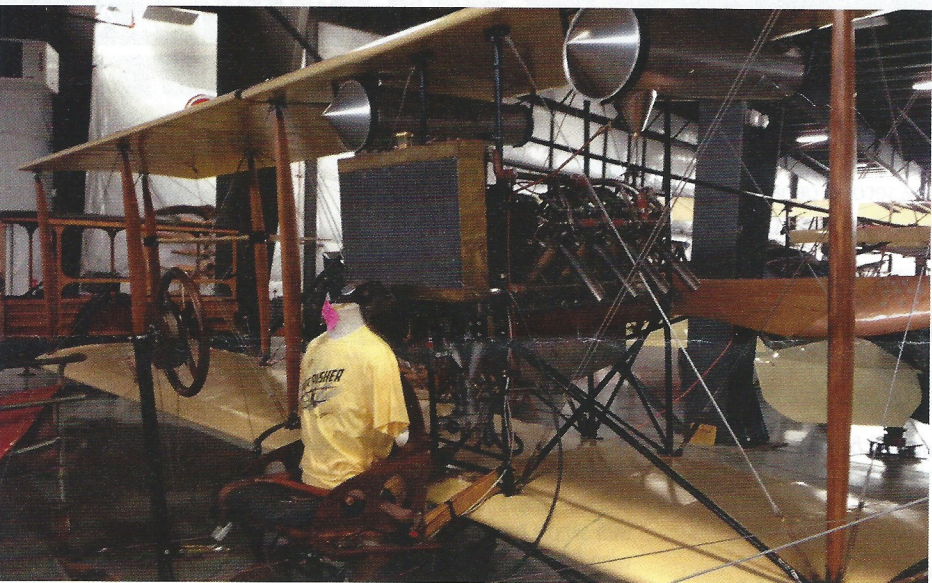
A donated P-39 model. Note the oil drip pan under it, just like the “big boys.”



Dick Clarke happily does one of the many volunteer jobs. He was active in the Civil Air Patrol for many years. He says, “This is about as close as I get to aviation these days.”



1917 Jenny JN-4D. On the other side of the display is a 1919 Ford Model T Army ambulance. Takes you back a lot of years, to hard work and a lot of bravery.



The original Curtiss Pusher was built before 1914, but this particular Pusher—the Parker-Curtiss Pusher—wasn’t designed until around 1914, and, yes, they fly it. Actually, volunteer Bill Avolio does. Thirty-five volunteers spent more than 3,000 hours restoring the airplane. The engine is a Curtiss OX-5, and CG range is 37.6 percent to 38.8 percent! The front wheel is not steerable; before takeoff you get it to the runway using a furniture dolly, then remove it. The controls are both sluggish and heavy. It takes off at about 30 mph and cruises at an estimated 60 mph. There’s no differential aileron control and rudder but no vertical stabilizer. A yaw string taped to the 14-inch wooden “steering wheel” is used for coordination. Descent and landing approach is at half-throttle—by sound. Bill says, “There is never a hands-off time when flying the Parker Pusher.”

Just like that! And while I was strolling around by myself a lady walked by, rather wide-eyed, and offered, “This place is incredible. I didn’t know it was here, just saw a sign about it as I was driving down the highway.” A pleasant discovery, indeed. A lot like Fran Gibbons experienced.

And the museum is not just displays; it has a plethora of activities, too. There’s Second Saturday. On the second Saturday of each month, the museum volunteers have a play day, and the public is invited. Airplanes fly, cars drive, and machines run (yes, they have a steam tractor, too). See what I mean about alive? And, on top of all that, lunch is served. Then there’s the Hood River Fly-In, the weekend after Labor Day. There were an estimated 340 airplanes flown in last year. In small town Hood River! That kinda fly-in. The real deal. And 180 of them stayed overnight for the next day’s activities. And there’s the WAAAM Traffic Jam Car Show. Gawk and talk and ride to your delight. And the WAAAM Swap Meet. Talk about good stuff, that’s where you find it. Too, there’s International Model A Day. See Henry Ford’s creation up close and personal. Want more? There are several Model T schools during the year. Drive history! And, as if to top it all off, there’s WAAAM Camp for kids 9 to 12 years old. They get to see, touch, and do aviation. You can get more details about all these things at [www.WAAAMuseum.org](http://www.WAAAMuseum.org).

I have to mention, this place is not only wonderful for you, but it’s also wonderful for the town of Hood River. Those 180 people that stayed overnight at the annual fly-in? They spent money on motels and meals and T-shirts, among other things. That’s good for the local economy. I sincerely hope city government appreciates that. Hood River has a “bird nest on the ground,” as my Oklahoma-born mother-in-law used to say. Indeed it does.

Okay, I’m out of superlatives. The place is just, well, fantastic. It’s so alive (there’s that word again) and friendly. Stop by and absorb it; it’ll put you in your happy place. **EAA**

**Lauran Paine Jr.**, EAA 582274, is a retired military pilot and retired airline pilot. He built and flies an RV-8 and has owned a Stearman and a Champ. Learn more about Lauran at his website, [www.ThunderBumper.com](http://www.ThunderBumper.com).