

***Taking Flight:
A Plan for the Future of the Millville
Army Air Field Museum***

Strategic Plan 2024-2026

**Presented by Lisa Tremper Hanover, Consultant
Millville Army Air Field Museum Strategic Planning Committee**

Approved 3 January 2024 by the MAAFAM Board of Directors



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Strategic Planning Process

Through a grant from the New Jersey Historic Trust, the board and staff of the Millville Army Air Field Museum (MAAFM) undertook a strategic planning process in March 2022 using the services of Lisa Tremper Hanover as a facilitator/consultant. Major themes of the plan are to provide financial, operational, advancement, and institutional stability direction. The plan objectively guides leadership in more sharply defining the mission and objectives, assessing needs relative to current and future structural and operational vulnerabilities, identifying opportunities for growth, expansion, and diversity of programs, and tightly defining operations while maintaining a realistic sense of financial feasibility.

A Strategic Planning Committee was established composed of MAAFAM Board members, the MAAFAM Executive Director, museum volunteers, and business and cultural leaders from the region. This group met four times to review and thoughtfully determine museum priorities related to financial sustainability & development (budget/fundraising/membership), facilities, collections, exhibitions & programming, audiences, marketing, and staff/governance. The group also discussed a revision and tightening of the Mission Statement, composed a Vision Statement, and affirmed Core Values for the organization. This group defined a focused vision for the future and identified specific and attainable strategic goals and action steps. Meeting dates: March 31, 2023; June 2, 2023; October 6, 2023; November 17, 2023.

The Strategic Planning Committee conducted a SWOT Analysis (Appendix A) which affirmed strengths and identified specific areas that require attention.

Hanover conducted 16 interviews with regional cultural and business organizations, aviation museums of similar scale in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and individual members of the Board and Steering Committee, in addition to monthly meetings with Executive Director Lisa Jester and Board Chairman Russell Davis. These conversations were a benchmark to assess MAAFAM's visibility and relevance and how the operation compares with similar military aviation museums. A summary of this environmental scan is attached (Appendix B).

Hanover conducted extensive discovery of museum documents, policies, budget, collections, programs, previous strategic planning meetings and other background materials relevant to the MAAFAM,

Board & Member/Visitor Surveys – Hanover developed two surveys, informed by the Strategic Planning Committee. The goal was to identify key strengths and challenges

facing the MAAFM and to foster a sense of inclusiveness during the planning process. Surveys were sent electronically via e-mail and USPO and conducted in a confidential manner.

Board Survey: invitations to participate were sent to 14 Board members with 13 responses...93% response rate

Member/Visitor Survey: invitations to participate sent to 520 people with 69 responses... 12% response rate

A summary of survey responses is attached as Appendix C.

Hanover made three presentations to the MAAFM Board of Directors to frame the strategic planning process, to provide an update on actions and the SWOT analysis, and to present a draft of the plan and implementation strategies. Board Meeting dates: April 5, 2023, July 12, 2023, December 2, 2023.

Hanover met with Jester and Davis to finalize objective and action steps to support the implementation of the identified themes and goals.

The many contributions of the following people gave structure and purpose to the process and resulting plan and I am grateful for their time and commitment to this project and the Millville Army Air Field Museum.

MAAFM Staff:

Lisa Jester, Executive Director/Air Show Director
Patty Oliver, Receptionist/Membership Coordinator
Joan Legg, Display Coordinator
Joe Nocera – Maintenance/WF55+ through State of New Jersey

Volunteers:

Dave McCarthy – Outreach Director
John Flint, Bob Trivellini – Preservation and Collections
Roy Wilson, Ed Carlaw – Model Shop
Charles Brozina – Library
Ed Cox, Jim Crispo, Dick Goldstine, Bob Dalessandro, Bob Leicht, Ed Possenti –
Maintenance/Military Restoration
Anthony Distefano – Researcher

MAAFM Board of Directors:

Russell O. Davis, Chairman
Chuck Wyble, President Emeritus/Vice Chairman
Jerry Carey, President
Robert Trivellini, Vice President
Charles J. Wettstein, Secretary
John H. Knoop, Treasurer
Rick Adams, Historian

Kim Ayres
Joseph Derella
Steve Graham
Regina Merkel
Joe Placentra
Ralph Thomas
Donna Vertolli

Strategic Planning Committee:

Kim Ayres, MAAF Board Member, Sr. VP Economic Development, Cumberland County Improvement Authority
Jerry Carey, MAAF Board President
Ray Compari, City of Millville Administrator
Russell Davis, MAAF Board Chairman
Joe Derella, MAAF Board Member
Michele Jackson, Smith & Jackson Military & Firearms Sales
Lisa Jester, MAAF Executive Director
Dave McCarthy, MAAF Outreach Director, Volunteer
Jim Salmon, Community Relations Director, Delaware River Bay Authority (DRBA)
Barry Smith, Smith & Jackson Military & Firearms Sales
Beth Smithson, Big Sky Aviation
Ralph Thomas, MAAF Board Member
Donna Vertolli, MAAF Board Member, President, Design Advertising
Chuck Wyble, MAAF Board Member

Museum History

The Millville Airport was dedicated "America's First Defense Airport" on August 2, 1941 by local, state, and federal officials. It was part of a program whose purpose was to base air fields in strategic locations around the United States prior to entry into World War II. South Jersey had been designated by the US Army as one of the thirteen vital areas in the defense of the Atlantic coastline.

In January 1943, The Millville Army Air Field, located in Cumberland County, was established as a Gunnery Range and as an alert field in the event of an attack on the East Coast. Gunnery training began with Curtiss P-40F "Warhawk" aircraft, quickly replaced with the Republic P-47 "Thunderbolt". The MAAF base had 64 Thunderbolts for training; the airfield had a capacity of 125 single-engine fighter aircraft. Training included radio range familiarization in the Link Trainer (flight simulator), familiarization with the cockpit, taxiing and parking. The Link Trainer simulation is currently highlighted on the premises in its own Link Trainer Building.

The Air Field District is significant for its association with homeland defense, and army pilot training during World War II. The Millville Army Air Field operated until 1945, and

over the course of four years, thousands of soldiers and civilians served here, with approximately 1,500 pilots receiving advanced fighter training in the P-47 Thunderbolt. The original facility included hangars, barracks, repair/machinery shops, warehouses, a theater, administration buildings, and a parade ground, among others.

After 1945, it was returned to the City of Millville with the restriction that it could not be closed or sold but it could be leased. Most buildings were converted to apartments for returning veterans. The Millville Airport veteran apartment community thrived throughout the forties, fifties, and sixties. The apartments vanished in the early 1970s, and the airport became a hub of industry and aviation for Southern New Jersey.

Currently, the airport is operated by the Delaware River and Bay Authority (DRBA) under a thirty-year lease with the City of Millville, renewable for ninety years. It supports a variety of personal and business aircraft and is home to the Millville Army Air Field Museum and Millville Wheels & Wings Air Show.

The roots of the Millville Army Air Field Museum (MAAFM) go back to the early 1970s. Millville Airport manager Lewis B. Finch had just completed eliminating the last apartments in former base buildings and looked forward to major industrial development at the airport. Most people in the community were aware the airport had been an army base but knew no details of its history. Local teenager Michael T. Stowe learned of underground bunkers just south of the airport. Stowe explored the bunkers and surrounding areas, finding related artifacts. For nearly ten years he collected artifacts and information, and in 1983 approached city officials about a permanent place at the Millville Airport to display the collection.

The Museum was incorporated in 1988, recently celebrating its 35-year anniversary. Stowe's original collection of artifacts and airfield data remains the cornerstone of the Millville Army Air Field Museum. The museum's collection has grown through donations of time, effort, and artifacts from the surrounding region and the community of veterans who served at the Millville Army Air Field. Today, both the Museum and Millville Airport continue to grow and prosper through the Delaware River & Bay Authority's (DRBA) management of the Millville Executive Airport and the Museum's growing reputation as a leader in World War II and post war aviation history.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Millville Army Air Field Museum is to honor, preserve, and share the World War II legacy of "America's First Defense Airport", Veterans, and related military history.

Original mission statement:

Millville Army Air Field Museum's (MAAFM) mission is to preserve and promote the WWII aviation and military history located at the Millville Airport (former Millville Army Air Field) in Millville, NJ. MAAFM accrues, researches, preserves, displays,

and educates with collections of valuable historic materials. It serves to recognize and commemorate American military aviation history, document and honor the lives of American veterans, and be the proprietor of historic buildings, structures, and murals, as well honor and promote the invaluable role of the P-47 'Thunderbolt' pursuit/fighter plane and its WWII pilots.

Vision Statement

The Millville Army Air Field Museum aspires to be the preeminent museum focused on WWII aviation training, military history related to the Millville Army Air Field story, and as an educational resource widely recognized for its collections, oral histories, and recognition of all Veterans.

Core Values

Preservation of History

We are stewards of WWII aviation and military history artifacts, in addition to subsequent American conflicts, and invested in sharing the oral histories and archives of our Veterans.

Patriotism

Our mission inspires pride and respect in and for the United States of America.

Education of Future Generations

Through our collections and programs we share the Millville Army Air Field Story and subsequent military and aviation events.

Commemoration

We recognize and honor Veterans, active military, and the homefront effort; We honor the 14 pilots who perished in training at the Millville Army Air Field between 1943-1945, and the invaluable role of the P-47 Thunderbolt fighter aircraft and its pilots.

Executive Summary - Introduction

This strategic plan will guide the Millville Army Air Field Museum [MAAFM] through FY2024-2026. This museum has made great strides in the past 15 years to professionalize the operation and its governance. Stable senior leadership has helped the museum and library grow and to reach a broader audience and they have established the museum as an important part of the network of cultural and entertainment offerings in the region. The board and staff have kept their focus on the value and relevance of this organization in terms of financial stability, audience, collections, and giving a voice to our Veterans of all generations, despite the disruptions caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. Museum leadership is aware of and planning for a more directed way of fundraising, capitalizing on their distinctive brand and donor base.

They are cognizant of the dwindling WWII veteran population but continue to advocate for the remarkable history and fundamental training that gave the United States the military aviation advantage.

This three year plan addresses all facets of the MAAFAM operation, identifying achievable goals and actions that will strengthen its infrastructure and prepare it for the next generation of leadership. While financial sustainability is the key driver of this plan, we must examine how other essential functions of the museum impact the budget and fundraising objectives.

The following strategic initiatives, goals, and accompanying implementation plan were agreed upon by the Strategic Planning Committee, and will be presented for review by the board of directors, as strategic priorities for the MAAFAM to focus its time, talent, and treasure on for the next three years. While some of the action items in the implementation plan are either in progress or ongoing from prior years, others are new opportunities identified by the strategic planning discussions. The matrix also illustrates the primary staff person/volunteer/or board member that will be responsible for each task, and supported as needed by additional board members and appropriate committees.

This plan is meant to be a communication tool as well as a method of operation. This enables the staff and board to be on the same page about priorities and actions and it is a means to let your broader community of members, veterans, donors, cultural and business partners know that you are working towards common goals in support of the long-term viability of a valued organization.

As the environment changes and the Museum's needs change, the plan must evolve. To this end, this Strategic Plan would be reviewed and updated annually.

The Executive Director and/or Board Chair/President should provide an update on any actions related to the primary Strategic Initiatives at every board meeting.

Primary Strategic Initiatives:

Achieve Financial Sustainability

Note: It is important that the Board and Staff keep Mission top of mind; don't shift priorities to accommodate donors; instead, educate your donor pool on your determined needs

Goal: Expand existing and grow new sources of revenue

Goal: Define and execute Sponsorship Opportunities

Goal: Define and initiate Endowment and Planned Giving Opportunities

Organizational Capacity

Goal: Create a plan for short/long term museum/library staff needs and

Human Resources infrastructure

Goal: Build, Strengthen and Diversify Board of Directors and Advisory Board membership and build practices with clear priorities and actions

Goal: Continue to build network of partners and professional organizations to support mission, visitation, and programs

Engagement & Experience

Goal: Strengthen permanent collection holdings with defined priorities, selective deaccessioning, stewardship, scholarship

Goal: Create exhibition installations that are engaging, informative, visual and interactive

Goal: Embrace and Enhance the Visitor Experience on site

Goal: Stewardship and Access to Library, Archives, Oral Histories

Visibility & External Relations

Goal: Strengthen the visibility of the MAAFM to increase community, regional and national awareness of our history, collections & programs

Optimize & Enhance Physical Facilities

Goal: Examine and right-size existing Historic District

Goal: Maintain and improve physical structures for staff, collections, and visitor safety

Synopsis of Millville Army Air Field Museum Operation [MAAFM]

The MAAFM currently employs 3 paid staff members: Executive Director (FT); Receptionist (PT) and Display Coordinator (PT); the State of NJ funds one part time maintenance worker through the Workforce 55+ program; Volunteers take on important museum functions in Volunteer/Tour coordination, Collections and Preservation, Model Shop, the Library and with Maintenance/Military restoration.

The museum, post-pandemic, welcomes over 9,000 visitors annually and another 15,000 experience the grounds and museum operation during years when an Air Show is presented. Special Veteran events garner another 250+ visitors. The budget remains static at \$250,000 per fiscal year.

There are 14 Members serving on the Board of Directors. The Bylaws state there must be a minimum of 10 members and a capacity of 18 members. The Board is actively looking to expand and diversify its membership. Board Committees include:

Capital Campaign/Air Show

Sustainability

Fundraising
Education
By-Laws/Preservation
Government Relations
Special Events
Social Media/Communications
Youth Connection
Strategic Planning
Public Relations

I recommend that Board leadership have Standing Committees and Ad-Hoc Committees. Combine Sustainability, Fundraising, Special Events, Government Relations into a Development Committee (which would encompass all fundraising initiatives and goals); combine Social Media/Communications and Public Relations into a Communications Committee; There could be an Education Committee (that embraces the Youth Connections and other education programs) and there should be a Collections Committee to formally approve all donations, acquisitions, deaccessions presented by the Executive Director. There should be a Facilities or Buildings and Grounds Committee to maintain consistency in oversight of your physical structures and grounds. Ad Hoc committees are Strategic Planning and the Wheels & Wings Air Show.

Officer Terms are one year, renewable. Board members serve 3 year terms, renewable and Officer terms are one year, renewable. The Bylaws don't account for a Chairman in an Officer capacity, but there is reference to voting for this position at the annual meeting held in January. Board meetings are held monthly, preceded by a Membership meeting. The Executive Director also prepares a comprehensive review of the year for the Advisory Board members.

Museum Footprint:

The MAAFAM leases 4 historic buildings:

Building 1 - Main Museum: Housed in the Base Administration building, it displays a large collection of World War II aviation artifacts of local and national interest. Programs and tours educate the community about Millville's vital role in aviation history. Our veteran volunteers, and the "living history" interviews and exhibits, are walking and talking American history.

Building 23 - The Henry Wyble Historic Research Library and Education Center: An original warehouse building, it houses an extensive collection of books, documents, and videos dealing with WWII, along with WWI and the Vietnam, Korean, Middle East, & Persian Gulf Wars, in addition to a large screen theater and unique model collections.

Building 25 - Millville Air Base Link Trainer Building: The Link Trainer, an original flight simulator, is housed in its original WWII building. One of five fully operational trainers worldwide, the Link Trainer is the name given to a series of flight simulators

produced from 1920's-1950's, designed by Edwin Albert Link. It was the only tool in its day to teach pilots to fly and land at night and in poor visibility.

Building 31 - Storage and Maintenance Building & Model Shop: Original Quartermaster's building; currently used for model classes, maintenance, and storage.

All other buildings in the historic district are managed and maintained by DRBA, with a few leased to private businesses including an aviation company, industrial businesses, a restaurant, and a brewery.