

National Aviation Heritage Area Recognizes Local Champions, Announces Future Plans and Grants



*Pictured: 2024 National Aviation Heritage Alliance (NAHA) meeting.
Courtesy of the National Aviation Heritage Alliance*

November 13, 2024, Press Release from the National Aviation Heritage Alliance: Dayton, Ohio — The National Aviation Heritage Alliance (NAHA), the designated management entity of the National Aviation Heritage Area, proudly celebrated its 20th anniversary during its annual meeting at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force on Tuesday night. At the event, NAHA honored four local leaders and organizations, announced community grant opportunities, and shared future initiatives, all while reflecting on two decades of preserving and promoting Dayton’s aviation heritage.

Among the evening’s highlights was the presentation of the prestigious Wick Wright Award to Norbert Klopsch, Oakwood City Manager, and Amy

Spowart, President & CEO of the National Aeronautic Association. Named in honor of the late Wick Wright, longtime Wright family spokesperson and grandnephew of the Wright brothers, this award celebrates outstanding support of a National Aviation Heritage Area partner or NAHA’s mission.

Norbert Klopsch was honored for his nearly two-decade-long commitment to Hawthorn Hill. He established a framework for educational tours that has introduced countless visitors to the Wright brothers' historic home. Most recently, Klopsch was instrumental in

facilitating Joby Aviation's plant announcement at Hawthorn Hill, a transformative investment of up to \$500 million and the creation of 2,000 jobs in Dayton.

Alex Heckman, Vice President of Museum Operations at Dayton History, nominated Norbert Klopsch for the award, saying, "Norb Klopsch came to mind for his long-standing connection to Oakwood and his dedicated partnership with the National Aviation Heritage Area, particularly in shepherding Hawthorn Hill as a publicly accessible site."

Amy Spowart was recognized for her visionary advocacy, notably her successful efforts to bring the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) conference to Dayton in October 2023. The event attracted aviation and air sports leaders from nearly 50 countries, significantly amplifying Dayton's reputation as a global aviation heritage hub.

The PROPS Award—given to a National Aviation Heritage Area partner demonstrating exceptional support to other area partners—was awarded to Steve Byington, Cultural Resources Manager at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and the Wright-Patterson AFB 88 Civil Engineer Group. Their collaborative support over the past 11 years has benefited the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park and NAHA exhibit at AirVenture in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. In 2023, they also played an essential role in alleviating staffing shortages at the Huffman Prairie Interpretive Center and supported events like the Balloon Glow, Smithsonian Air & Space Board visit, and preparations for the 2024 Solar Eclipse.

Cynthia Brubaker, a dedicated volunteer at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force for over 50 years, received the Ivonette Wright Miller Award. Named after the niece of Wilbur and Orville Wright, this award honors lifetime volunteers who have profoundly impacted aviation heritage. Brubaker, who has contributed more than 29,000 volunteer hours, is a foundational part of the museum's community.

The National Aviation Heritage Alliance also announced plans to award up to \$325,000 in community grants aimed at fostering aviation heritage projects, and to develop an accessibility guide thanks to a grant from the National Park Foundation. As part of its ongoing advocacy, NAHA will continue collaborating with the National Park Service and the City of Dayton to protect the historic Wright Company factory buildings. The Alliance will also capitalize on Montgomery County's designation as an American World War II Heritage City and work to build awareness of Dayton Aviation's inclusion on UNESCO's World Heritage tentative list.

In addition to these forward-looking initiatives, NAHA installed Colonel (Ret.) Michael Heil as its new Chair of the Board of Trustees, succeeding Colonel (Ret.) Susan Richardson after her three-year tenure. Col. Heil, an independent aerospace and defense consultant, currently serves as President of the Ohio Aerospace Institute and holds advisory roles with the University of Cincinnati and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, as well as board positions with The Cleveland Engineering Society, The Aerospace States Association, and The AFIT Foundation.



Pictured: Mike Heil and Susan Richardson
Courtesy of the National Aviation Heritage Alliance

Michael Heil highlighted the National Aviation Heritage Area's significant impact on the Dayton region, stating, "One of the great values of NAHA is its ability to provide grants for deserving projects that will attract more tourists and spread the story of Dayton as the world center for aviation and aerospace development. The best days of the National Aviation Heritage Area are ahead of us."

As NAHA celebrates 20 years of service to the aviation community, it remains committed to its mission of preserving and promoting Dayton's aviation heritage for future generations. Applications for large grants are due by December 31, 2024, while smaller grants will be reviewed on a rolling basis, beginning on December 31, 2024.