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Angels help save air show

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Angels help save air show

By SABA ALI Staff Writer, (856) 237-9020

Press of Atlantic City.com | Cumberland : Angels help save air show

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MILLVILLE — All it took was a little help from up above to keep next year's annual Millville Wheels & Wings Airshow from getting grounded. A U.S. Navy Blue Angels F-18 Hornet fighter jet flew into Millville on Tuesday to start preparations for the 15th annual air show scheduled for Memorial Day weekend. The nationally renowned military act will be headlining the air show next year.

However, the Blue Angels appearance, or even the air show itself, would not have been possible without the generosity of Goodman Properties, said Russell Davis, Millville Army Airfield Museum president and air show director. For the first time in the air show's history, there will be a presenting sponsor, Goodman Properties, which is willing to support the show at the highest level of sponsorship with a check for \$50,000, Davis said.

"My board of directors basically told me that we can only continue with the air show if we break even this year," he said.

For the past few years, the air show has suffered severe losses due to bad weather that cut down on the number of spectators willing to purchase tickets. The losses had left the nonprofit organization in the red when it came time for planning the air show for next year.

Board members would not disclose how much the air show has lost, only saying they are in the "negative".

"In the last two years, we lost ticket sales due to the rain. We had negative cash flow. Without the ticket money we didn't have enough to cover debt ... we were in danger to not go ahead," Davis said.

However, a few weeks ago, Goodman Properties, developers for the Union Lake Crossing shopping center, agreed to the museum's request to step up as the show's presenting sponsor. Davis said they were able to get both Goodman Properties and the Blue Angels on board quick enough to rally the members for another year.

Goodman Properties saw sponsoring the air show as a good way to help celebrate the completion of the shopping center next year.

"We did it because we think it's exciting and it's a great way to open up the center," said Steve Durst, representing Goodman Properties.

The developers will have the premier marketing space on billboards, fliers and booklets handed out at the air show, which usually brings in thousands of spectators from around the region. The shopping center has been embroiled in controversy brought on by a local watchdog group, Millville First, concerned about how development is affecting taxes and the use of eminent domain.

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Bill Rich's eyes welled up with tears when he remembered his experiences as a Thunderbolts pilot in World War II. He's one of the only ones left. "I flew with these guys," the 84-year-old said as he pointed to posters on the wall inside the museum at Millville Airport. ...

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Durst said Goodman Properties decided to become a sponsor because having the air show was important to the community. The clincher for the agreement was when the board was able to bring in the Blue Angels.

"It adds a great star quality to the show," Durst said.

Davis said that while Goodman Properties is the presenting sponsor, there are other key sponsors, including the New Jersey Motorsports Park and local businesses. This will be the Blue Angels second year performing in the Millville Airshow. The flight demonstration squadron will consist of six air combat F/A-18 fighter jets performing precision maneuvers used in actual naval operations, said Lt. Dan McShane, who flew in with Maj. Nathan Miller.

Both U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo, R-2nd, and Mayor Jim Quinn were at the airport to welcome the Blue Angels officers to Millville. David Schultz Airshows LLC will be coordinating and producing the Millville air show for eight years. Millville will be one of 35 it will be working on for next year.

Also included in the air show will be vintage warbirds, modern military and civilian aircraft and hundreds of restored classic and antique automobiles. This year's air show brought in about 15,000 attendees, while in previous airshows they average about that many per day.

Now all the air show needs is a little sunshine, Davis said.

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