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## LIVING THE DREAM: Perdue et al inducted into Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame

by Melissa Orrison

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The Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame held its 32nd annual enshrinement ceremony Saturday May 17. Charles Dolson, Sonny Perdue, Michael Williams, and former Governor Sonny Perdue were inducted into the Hall of Fame in a ceremony at the Museum of Aviation in Warner Robins.

Aviation Hall of Fame Chairman Jimmy Norton said in his opening remarks that the Museum of Aviation is a “bright star,” second only to the museum at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. Norton recognized the impact of aviation and the latest inductees: “If not for the people we induct, there would be deficits in the economy and defense.”

Georgia Senate President Pro Tem John F. Kennedy credited aviation with making Georgia the #1 state in which to do business. He attributes a \$73.7 billion dollar economic impact to our state’s airports, which provide 450,000 jobs. Senator Kennedy became a pilot as a Mercer law student in the early 1990s.

World War II Veteran Charles Dolson, the first aviator to be inducted, was President and CEO of Delta Airlines, later serving on the Board of Directors. He was known for contributing to the development of Hartsfield Jackson International Airport. A family member accepted the award for Dolson, who died in 1992.

Douglas Matthews, founded two aviation companies, including the largest Fixed Base Operator in Georgia. He served with distinction in Vietnam. He also founded The Flight International Group and Flight International Airlines.

Macon native Michael Williams, is known for groundbreaking advances in airline safety, including smoke detection and fire suppression systems he developed. He was inspired to enter the field after the 1982 crash of an Air Florida flight into the Potomac River, on which he had almost been a passenger.

The last inductee, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue (2003-2011), shared that he grew up watching crop duster planes land on Highway 96 near his family's farm in Bonaire. As a University of Georgia student, he got his pilot's license and commuted home for the weekend, also landing on Highway 96.

Perdue credited his aviation skills and private plane with helping him win the governor's race against incumbent Roy Barnes, who had a much larger campaign budget.

As governor, he led efforts to expand runways at Georgia airports, making sure that every Georgia was within 70 miles of an airport that could accommodate 85% of aircraft, which attracts business and industry.

After serving as Secretary of Agriculture during President Trump's first term, he currently serves as the 14th Chancellor of the University System of Georgia. Since I joined the faculty of Middle Georgia State University last year, I hoped to meet him.

However, by the end of the night, both of my shoes were broken. Although Perdue seemed like a down-to-earth kind of guy, I was too embarrassed to approach him with bare feet.

Middle Georgia State University is known for its aviation program. I had two aspiring pilots in my class last semester. University President Dr. Christopher Blake was in attendance, along with his wife Dr. Melody Blake, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Wesleyan College.

My husband and I enjoyed the event, which we attended as guests of Board Member Mike Misinco, a Monroe County resident. Mike says his first word as a baby was “airplane.” He was inspired to become a pilot by his father, who was a pilot and mechanic in World War II and Vietnam.

Mike’s wife Mary, who is in my book club, assisted him with the silent auction. Assorted aviation items such as model planes, scrapbooks, and photos were up for auction, as well as other items like photos of President Trump, Augusta National Golf Club, and The Beatles.

My husband got me a scrapbook of World War I pilots and had his eye on a large model airplane, but decided it was too big to fit in our car.

We were pleased to see my newspaper colleague Sloan Oliver and his wife, who were seated at the table next to us. Sloan, an army veteran, shared that he had flown on one of the planes displayed at the museum.

It was enlightening to meet so many people for whom aviation was not only a pastime, but a way of life. I previously thought of time spent in airports and on airplanes only as necessary inconveniences standing between me my destination, but I left the event with new appreciation of aviation’s impact on Georgia and the world.

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