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LOCAL

Ames renames airport after Black aviator; names new plaza after city manager



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The Ames City Council voted to rename the Ames Municipal Airport for aviator James Herman Banning, one of the first Black pilots to fly coast-to-coast, and to name the new downtown plaza after longtime Ames City Manager Steve Schinker.

The council considered the new names at its meeting Tuesday. Council member Tim Gartin was the only no vote against renaming the airport the James Herman Banning Ames Municipal Airport because he said there should have been other historic figures in aviation to consider.

Banning was a Black pilot and trailblazer in aviation. He was born in Oklahoma on Nov. 5, 1899. Banning's family moved to Ames in 1919, and he began studying engineering at Iowa State University.

Banning and Thomas Cox Allen of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, joined together in 1932 to become the first African American pilots to fly coast-to-coast.

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Gartin said he didn't have opposition toward Banning, but he had concerns about the process, including that Banning's name was the only one the council seriously considered and the only name it asked the public to consider.

"We talk extensively about the importance about doing things in a way that's inclusive in this community," Gartin said. "But we didn't really have a chance to consider (other names) because the process was from the very beginning only looking at one candidate."

Ames' efforts to garner community input on Banning resulted in three other potential names for the airport, including Neta Snook Southern, Hartley A. "Hap" Westbrook and Frederick

Douglass Patterson. All had connections to Ames and aviation.

Southern was born in 1896 in Illinois and moved to Ames as a teenager. She enrolled in mechanical drawing, internal combustion engines and the repair and maintenance of farm tractors at Iowa State University, according to the Iowa Aviation Museum.

In 1917, she was the first woman accepted to the Davenport School of Aviation. She became the first woman in Iowa to rebuild an airplane, which she soloed in 1920. She's also known for giving Amelia Earhart flying instruction.

Westbrook, a U.S. Air Force pilot and prisoner of war in World War II, helped establish the Iowa Air National Guard in 1954. He started Hap's Air Service in Guthrie Center, which later moved to the Ames Municipal Airport where he taught Ames-area residents to fly.

Patterson was one of Banning's roommates while attending Iowa State College. He later became president of the Tuskegee Institute and founded the now legendary Tuskegee Airmen of the World War II U.S. Army Corps.

Gartin said he hoped his dissention to the airport renaming would help the council consider a more inclusive process in the future.

"I think it's important that we try to avoid a process that is limited to just one name and that we would give a full consideration to the others," Gartin said.

Along with approving the airport's new name, the Ames City Council voted to approve using \$7,400 to change the signs at the airport. It will be paid for with the City Council Contingency Fund.

Council names downtown plaza the Steven L. Schainker Plaza

Also at Tuesday's meeting, the Ames City Council voted to approve naming the new downtown plaza the Steven L. Schainker Plaza.

At the council meeting Oct. 25, Mayor John Haila surprised the public and Schainker by proposing the name for the new \$4.6 million plaza that will bring open green space to downtown, along with a summer water feature that will transition to an ice rink in the winter. Under construction now, it will be located east of City Hall.

More: Construction could start next month on Ames plaza that will bring an ice rink downtown

Public input was not sought on the plaza's new name, and Schainker's was the only one considered. He's been the Ames city manager for 40 years.

The vote was unanimous.

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