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New air museum attracts young and old alike

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By Lynn Zerschling lzerschling@siouxcityjournal.com | Posted: Saturday, July 31, 2010 10:30 pm |

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SIOUX CITY -- Lorraine and Cleon Wood of Cedar Falls, Iowa, had to be there, as did hundreds of other veterans to see the B-17 Flying Fortress and tour the new MidAmerican Museum of Aviation & Transportation.

Many young families with children came, with the kids interested in the big trucks, big planes and the toys that were for sale. The large building and its grounds were packed with people, including many active military personnel.

Cleon Wood was stationed at the Sioux City Airbase during World War II where he trained to fly one of those Flying Fortresses. He and his crew left Sioux City for the European Theater where he flew 31 missions. While he was flying missions over Germany, Lorraine Wood said she worried, like all other B-17 wives.

"We didn't have e-mail or cell phones like you do now. You waited for a letter. Around the approach of D-Day, no mail got through."

The closest he came to being shot down was on his first mission on Easter Sunday 1944 over Poland when the Allied B-17s took heavy fire from German fighters. A number of other planes were shot down, but not his.

JIM LEE [Buy this photo](#)
 People look at exhibits during the grand opening ceremony at the Mid America Museum of Aviation & Transportation Saturday, July 31, 2010. (Jim Lee/Sioux City Journal)

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The Woods said the new museum is a tribute to those World War II veterans, as well as showcasing a wide range of aircraft, trucks and other vehicles.

Nearby, Elliot McLarty, who will be a fifth-grader at Blessed Sacrament School in Sioux City, said his favorite display was the UH60 helicopter.

"I learned about them from books my dad has," Elliot said as he looked at books on aircraft in the museum's gift shop. His father, Pat, served in the Reserves.

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A number of children went home with puzzles, inflatable war planes and miniature cars, while adults looked at the vast array of T-shirts, mugs and other items for sale.

Virginia Pieslak of Lowell, Mass., served in the U.S. Air Force from 1956-57, and said she visited the museum with her sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Mickey Lucart of Sioux City. He is a Navy veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Margaret (Mead) Petrucka, now of Cherokee, Iowa, worked for the 347th typing up information for military clothing shipments at the base during the war. She recalls waving to the airmen and soldiers as they left for the front.

"You knew some of them were not coming back," she said.

Marcia and Otis "Morrie" Baker, who was a jet engine mechanic at the airbase, said they think the museum will allow those who did not go through a war to learn to appreciate the sacrifice of those who did.

If You Go

When Open: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursdays-Tuesdays and open holidays except for New Year's, Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Closed Wednesdays.

Cost: Adults: \$6; seniors: \$5; active military: \$5; children (5-14): \$3 and free for 4 and younger; group tours: \$5.

Location: North of Sioux Gateway Airport at 2600 Expedition Court.

What's to see: Variety of aircraft and transportation vehicles including vintage bicycles, cars, fire truck and police cars, military vehicles and displays to a Boeing 727-200.

Contact: (712) 252-5300; www.matamuseum.org.

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