

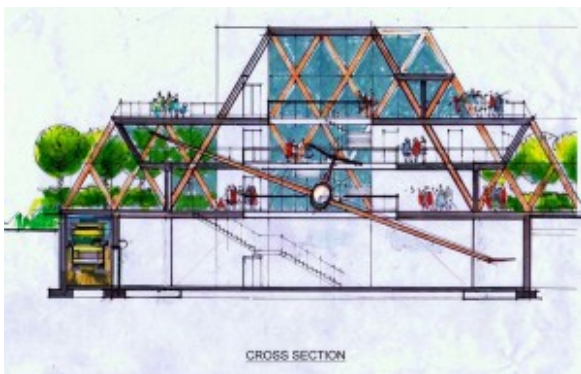
Minden airport becoming a sports aviation center

By Anne Knowles

When Douglas County developed a plan to revitalize its economy, it's no wonder planners looked to the Minden-Tahoe Airport, which already brings an estimated \$30 million into the region annually.

"The airport is one of the major economic engines in the community," said Linda Mae Draper-Hivert, a member of the Minden-Tahoe Airport Advisory Committee and economic vitality champion for Sports Aviation.

Draper-Hivert and a team of seven are working to capitalize on the airport and the region's well-known soaring conditions – the Sierra Wave, caused by the mountain range, helps gliders soar higher – to boost tourism and add jobs.



A rendering of what the museum may look like.

Sports Aviation is one of 12 components of the county's 2-year-old economic vitality plan, which also includes efforts to rejuvenate the South Shore and the downtowns of Gardnerville and Genoa as well as build an extensive network of hiking trails throughout the county.

The airport team's goals include building a flying museum and learning center on the east side on the airport as well as hosting a series of aviation events designed to draw visitors from all over the world.

"It's a big, big project," said Draper-Hivert, a pilot who has been operating at the airport since 1979.

To accomplish it, the nonprofit Sports Aviation Foundation was established four months ago, and \$5,000 has been raised so far to pay a grants writer to procure grants for funding much of the work.

The group has already launched the Aviation Roundup Air Show & Fly-in, an event first held last August and scheduled this year on June 30 and July 1 at the airport. Last year's event, said Draper-Hivert, had something for everyone, including aerobatic performances, glider rides and exhibits such as the Zoo, a display of planes – named the Beaver, Mustang, Bronco and Husky – for children to view and explore.

The goal, said Draper-Hivert, is to emulate the Oshkosh Air Venture, a 60-year-old event that attracts half a million visitors and infuses \$180 million into the Wisconsin economy.

"There's nothing quite like that on the West Coast," she said.

Another event, the U.S. Open Class Nationals, an annual gliding competition that hasn't been hosted in Minden since 1997, is June 10-21 at the airport. In March, SoaringNV, a gliding business located at the airport, sponsored a Wave Camp, a weeklong clinic to learn how to fly the Sierra Wave.

Draper-Hivert said plans are to build facilities at the airport to better accommodate future events, including an RV park and tie downs for participants.

The biggest piece of the Sports Aviation project is what Draper-Hivert called the Aviation Heritage Museum and

Challenger Learning Center. Renderings of the museum were drawn up by Eissmann-Pence Architects in Minden, an in-kind donation of \$30,000.

The museum will house aviation displays and informational kiosks while the Challenger Learning Center will join a network of 47 such centers around the world. The nonprofit learning centers were established by the families of the astronauts lost during the last flight of the Challenger space shuttle in 1986.

The centers provide simulators and mock-ups of mission control and an orbiting space station. An inflatable dome owned by the Challenger Learning Center of Northern Nevada, planned in Sparks, has already traveled to Douglas County schools. Draper-Hivert said it features 13 programs for kids including trips to the moon, under the sea and on the Titanic, all as 3D projections inside the dome.

Draper-Hivert said the county hopes to build and open the museum and learning center by 2016 or 2018.

The other members of the Sports Aviation team led by Draper-Hivert are Terry Lalonde, Mike Bradford, Ed Hayes, Laurie Harden, Rick Walters, Bobbi Thompson and Chris Johnson.