

# VERO BEACH AIRPORT

By Brittany Fining



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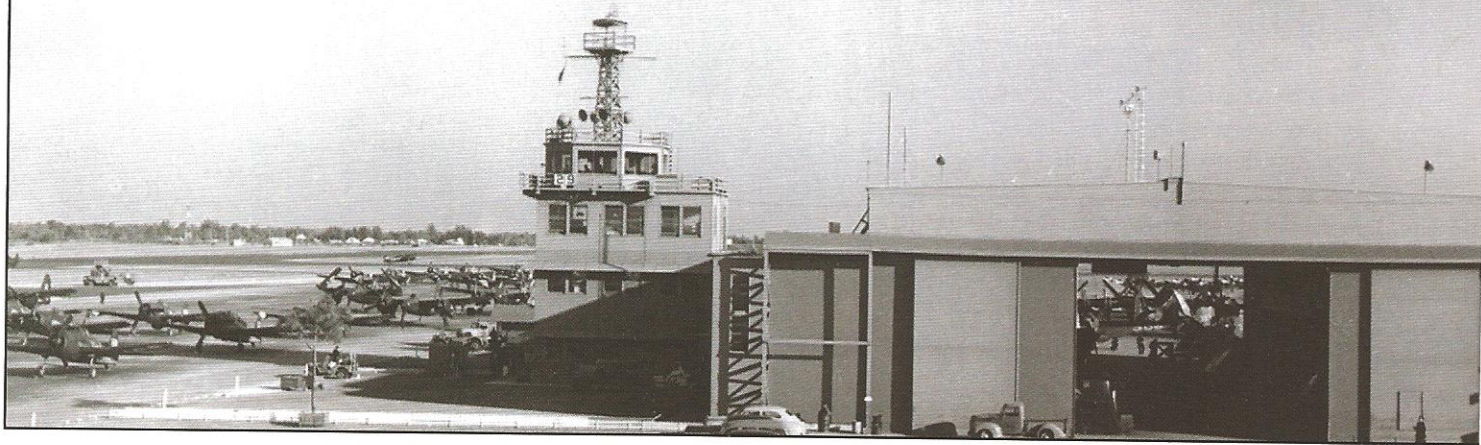
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The Vero Beach Municipal Airport sits on 1660 acres. The property includes seven miles of airfield pavement (runways and taxiways), over 800 runways and taxiway lights, and 100 lighted airfield signs. The airport is the base for around 225 aircrafts and operates about 170,000 take-offs and landings per year. It is home to three full-service FBOs and several smaller FBOs.

In 1928, city leaders in Vero Beach, FL sought to both attract business and expand the Vero Beach community. To achieve this, they desired an airfield to allow them to join the popular movement of air transportation. A 100-acre site was selected and cleared for a small airport, just north of McAnsh Park. Flights began in 1929, and the airport was officially dedicated in a two-day celebration that ran from March 3rd through 4th, 1930.





The airport's first hangar was constructed near the initial terminal building, and a center ramp was developed to allow for aircraft parking in 1934-35. Airfield lighting was also added during the 1930's, making nighttime operations possible. Eastern Air Transport, Eastern Air Lines' predecessor, began using Vero Beach as a refueling stop on its route from Miami to Jacksonville. Soon, Eastern was using Vero Beach Airport for passenger and mail stops as well.

In 1938, the airport was able to pave three runways, due to a \$600,000 grant from the federal government. When WWII began, the Navy won a contract to develop the airfield as a Naval Air Station, which expanded the airport to over 2300 acres. In 1942, naval personnel began arriving, and the Navy became the largest employer in the Vero Beach area.

Commander H.L. Young, USN, was assigned as the first commanding officer NAS. During the war years, hundreds of fighter pilots were trained at NAS Vero Beach, including some from other countries. Upon the conclusion of the war, the air base was deeded back to the city, and it again became the Vero Beach Municipal Airport in 1947.

With the departure of the Navy, the City of Vero Beach was responsible for the maintenance of former the Naval Air Station. Finding new uses

for the former Navy facilities became the main focus of the city and airport leaders, as this would bring new tenants and business to the area and stimulate the local economy.


In 1948, the Brooklyn Dodgers entered into multiple agreements with the city to purchase the land both south and west of the airfield for use as a spring training site. The new ball fields were constructed, and the former barracks became the players' housing units. Later on, the Brooklyn Dodgers became the Los Angeles Dodgers, who trained in Vero Beach for over 60 years, until they finally relocated under new ownership in

2008 to Glendale, Arizona.

Air transportation picked up in the 1950's and 1960's, with Eastern Air Lines flying regularly using Douglas DC-3s, Martin 404s, and Convair 440s. In 1957, Piper Aircraft located a manufacturing plant in Vero Beach in its current location at the southeast corner of the airfield and began building the PA-28 (Cherokee) in the 1960's. Also during this decade, the Dodgers began arriving regularly in the team aircraft, a Lockheed Electra, piloted by "Bump" Holman, son of the first manager of the Vero Beach Airport.


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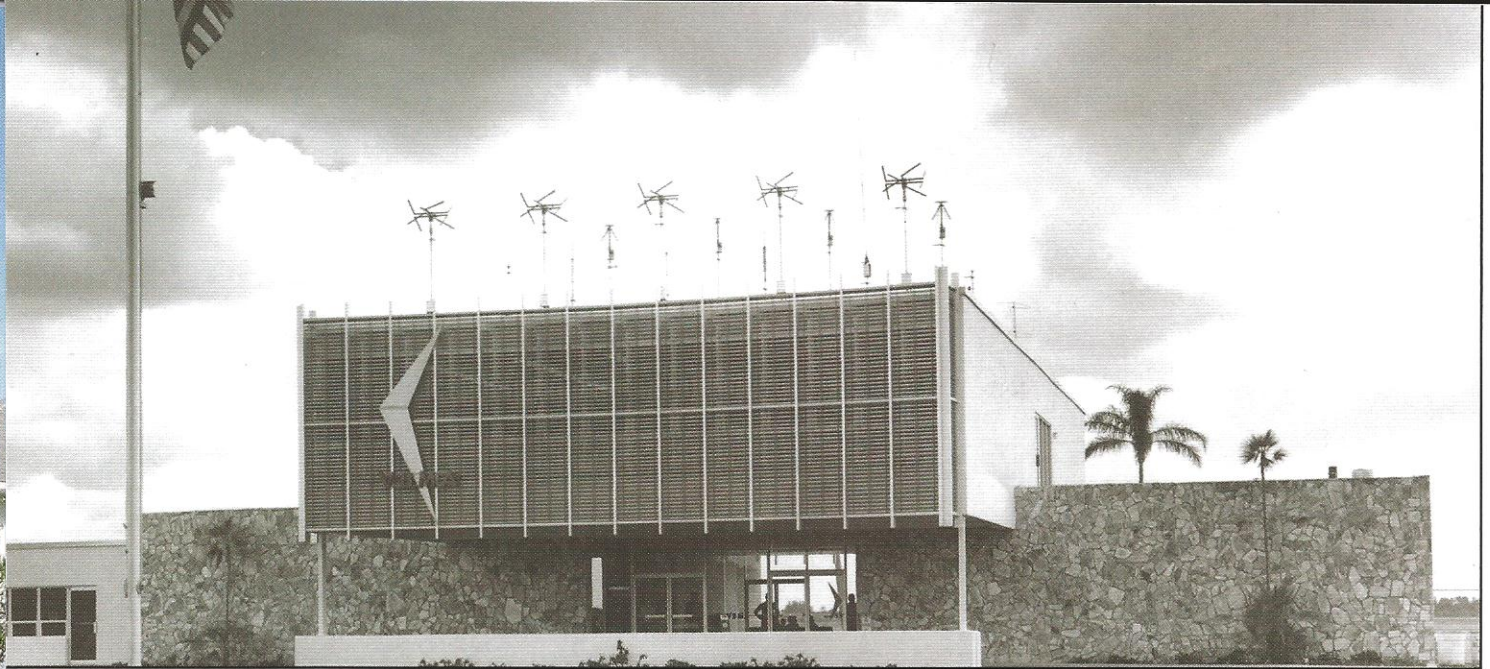
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Ueltchi, leased a hangar from the City and began flight-training operations in Vero Beach. The operation grew, becoming a premier international flight school with over forty locations worldwide. Flight Safety also purchased ten acres of land from the city and used it to build dormitories and administrative facilities for both its staff and its students.

The area's economy was doing well, and in the 1970's, Piper Aircraft employed over 3,500 people. The PA-34 Seneca was introduced in 1971, and the PA-42 Chey-

enne was first produced in 1974. Many other models were designed, tested, and produced for the booming general aviation market. To meet demand, the Vero Beach Airport grew, as well, adding a new fire station, new terminal, and new tower, and making various runway, taxiway, and hangar improvements. In order to use the nearly 2000 acres for business and increase airport revenue, land was leased to developers for 20-year terms. At the Chamber of Commerce's recommendation, and Airport Commission was formed as an advisory board to the City Council, and airport management began to aggressively pursue development grants from both the federal and state governments.

Eastern Air Lines terminated service in 1973, and the Vero Beach Airport began searching for a replacement commercial airline service. Multiple smaller airlines served the airport in the 1970's, such as Vero Monmouth Airlines, Shawnee Airlines, Florida Atlantic Airlines, and more. In 1980, Chautauqua Airlines served the airport as an Allegheny Commuter and served for eleven years, until departing in 1991. Following Chautauqua's departure, several other airlines attempted scheduled service at Vero Beach Airport. Gulfstream International, Florida Gulf, and American Eagle all flew from the terminal, with the last airline, American Eagle, leaving in 1996. Since that year, there has been no commercial service, though the airport continues to thrive as a busy general aviation airport, with many businesses operating out of it. In 1998, the economic impact of the Vero Beach Airport was estimated to be over \$300 million; in 2007, the estimate was over \$500 million.

In 2001, after the tragic events of September 11th, airline and airport security changed drastically. New security regulations and requirements made airline service at the Vero Beach Airport much more costly. Additionally, Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne in 2004 caused millions of dollars in damage and significant changes in building codes. As a result, the airport and its many businesses had to rebuild and regroup. A new tower was built in 2003, a new

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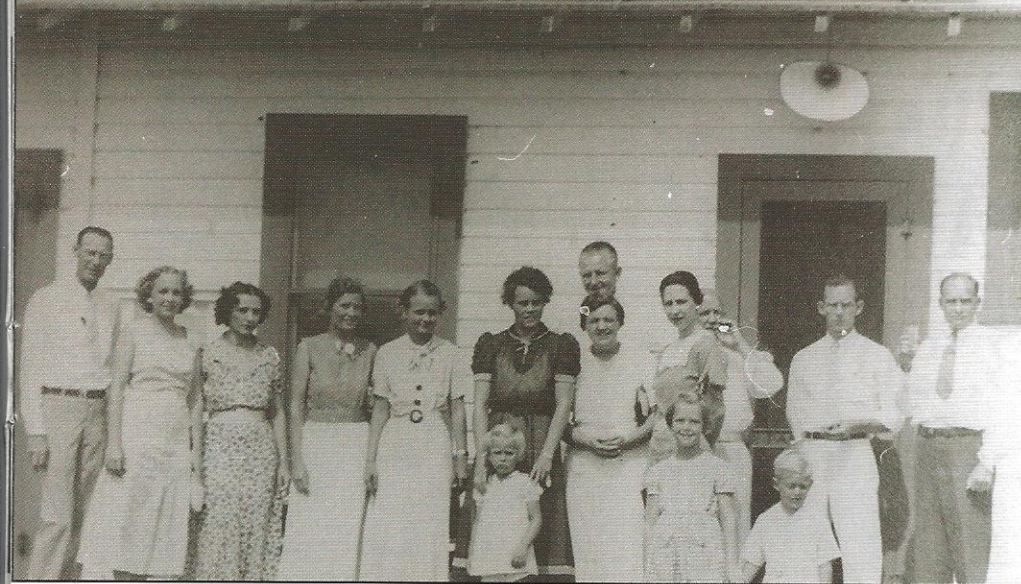
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with the focus on preparing for emerging growth. Many aviation and non-aviation enterprises continue to conduct their businesses out of the airport, with improvements to Aviation Boulevard and the Historic Dodgertown area in the works.

In 2011, the Vero Beach Airport won the GA Airport Project of the Year Award for innovative design and environmentally conscious construction methods from FDOT. In this time of reduced costs for development, entrepreneurship, and emerging markets, the airport will once again be poised for future success.

radar system was complete in 2007, which helped to enhance air traffic control safety, and a newly renovated terminal was finished in 2008.

While this was a difficult period for the airport, there were many successes during this time. In 2003, a new airport traffic control tower, operated by the Federal Aviation Administration, was completed. In 2004, the Vero Beach Airport won the General Aviation Airport of the Year award from the Florida Department of Transportation. Furthermore, the new airport terminal building completed in 2008 used hurricane-resistant and energy-efficient methods of construction, in preparation for the possibility of future rough hurricane seasons.

With the recession of 2008 and 2009, development at the airport slowed, but nonetheless continued,



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