



# News Release

For Immediate Release: January 22, 2019

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## DAR presents historic marker to Leesburg International Airport

**LEESBURG, FL** – A group of over fifty people including elected officials, veterans and DAR members gathered at Leesburg International Airport on Jan. 17 for the unveiling of a historic marker recognizing the airport's role in WWII. The bronze marker was presented by the Mary Ellen Robertson Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Construction of Leesburg Army Airfield was started in late 1941 by the Army Air Corps. By 1943 servicemen of the 313<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron, also known as the "Lucky Puppies", were training to fly P-40's and later P-47's in the skies over Leesburg. The airport was used by the Army for training and testing and for a short time as a POW camp. It was deactivated in 1947 and in 1948 it was deemed surplus and deeded to the City of Leesburg.

While researching the Lucky Puppies, Charyl Winner, Regent of the local DAR Chapter, learned the extent of Leesburg Army Airfield's involvement in the war effort. She presented the information to the members of the Mary Ellen Robertson Chapter and the group decided it was important to memorialize the historical significance of the airport.

Winner noted that there is already a plaque at the airport commemorating the pilots who trained there in WWII. "The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution does not permit a marker that replicates one already on site," she said. As a result, the group did extensive research into the additional training activities that took place at the airport. That research and supporting documents were presented to the DAR's National Historian General's Office for consideration.

The approved marker recognizes the servicemen other than pilots who were stationed here for training including Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battalions, 91<sup>st</sup> Service Group and Army Air Force School of Applied Tactics.



The local DAR chapter presented a historic marker to Leesburg International Airport on January 17th



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Dawn Lemongello, Florida State Regent of NSDAR, said the marker will make people take notice of the airport and will educate them on the role Leesburg played in WWII. "This marker will make people think," said Lemongello. "Maybe they'll dig a little deeper and understand more what was going on about WWII and (the) historic significance of their town of Leesburg."

Benjamin Mack-Johnson, 16 year-old founder of the WWII Veterans History Project, spoke about the history of the airport, those who trained there and the importance of preserving our nation's history.

Mack-Johnson noted that the pilots who trained in Leesburg were some of the best the Army Air Force had during WWII. The Lucky Puppies served with the 50<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron and endured fierce fighting in the European Theater. Only 29 of the 80 combat planes they flew returned home at the end of the war.

"After starting my non-profit organization around 3½ years ago, I began to understand that preserving history was not just a passion I had, but a duty that we should all embrace," said Mack-Johnson. "I am honored to be here today at the Leesburg Army Airfield, a historic WWII treasure here in Florida. With the dedication of this important marker, all who visit moving forward will remember how this location helped the United States succeed during WWII."

The effort to bring the marker to the airport started almost a year ago. Airport Manager Tracey Dean thanked the local and state DAR members for their efforts. "I am thrilled they approached me with this idea," said Dean. "Regardless if it's past events, current or looking to the future, it's great to see how many people appreciate this airport and enjoy it."

The historic marker is affixed to the Airport Administration Building located at 8807 Airport Boulevard, Leesburg.



Charyl Winner, Regent of the Mary Ellen Robertson Chapter, unveiled a historic marker presented by the NSDAR to Leesburg International Airport

*Leesburg is a progressive city of more than 21,000 residents in northwest Lake County. The city government serves twice as many people with its electric, gas, water and wastewater public utilities. Leesburg is also a central hub for commerce, attracting 50,000 people to work each weekday. For more information, visit [www.leesburgflorida.gov](http://www.leesburgflorida.gov).*

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