

Ground broken for Palmdale Heritage Air Park

by Leona C. Bull
staff writer

Ground was officially broken this week for the 26.4-acre Plant 42 Heritage Air Park in Palmdale, Calif.

Air Force Plant 42 Commander Lt. Col. Robert Catlin spoke of the rich heritage of the Palmdale facility.

"This Heritage Air Park will celebrate the rich aerospace heritage and history of the Antelope Valley," Catlin said. "It will honor the men and women in our nation's services who operated and maintained these aircraft and it will also honor the workers who operated and maintained this industrial airfield complex for the last 50 years."

Palmdale Mayor Jim Ledford and Col. Ronald E. Channell, director of Acquisition Environmental Management for the Air Force Materiel Command's Aeronautical Systems Center, signed a five-year lease for the park.

"This unique park not only celebrates the partnership between the city of Palmdale and the Air Force, but it also celebrates the historical significance of the noble aircraft that has been used, flown and modified at this facility," Channell said. "The aircraft that are planned to be placed in this park

have contributed in profound ways over the last half century to our nation's freedom and future.

"We are fortunate to have this park, to educate our community and commemorate the rich aerospace heritage of the Antelope Valley," said Channell. "This park also honors the many talented aerospace workers who design and built many of our country's key aircraft.

"From the F-100 to the B-2 Bombers, these aircraft and the people behind them were called upon to complete their mission in support of our nation," he said. "As we establish the Plant 42 Heritage Air Park, we are taking a step to keeping alive an important piece of our American history."

The most recent addition to the collection - an F-105 - was taken off a flat bed truck while the assembled spectators watched. It will eventually be placed right next to the F-104 that is currently "on loan" from Plant 42, but will eventually be a permanent part of the park's collection. A C-130 and a T-38 have been confirmed for the collection, though the delivery dates have yet to be confirmed.

The next big project for the organizers is getting the F-100 and the F-105 permanently placed in their designated positions, says Tim Hughes, a City of Palmdale Public

Works employee.

"To get the craft suitable for display, the F-100 has had its engine removed, while the F-104 still has an old engine in it," Hughes said. "What we will end up doing is pulling them onto a concrete pad and tying them down with cables.

"Some of the aircraft that we'll get from Davis Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., will have to go through a 'de-mil' process.

"That means that we will have to take out the fluids from the engines and remove the avionics," Hughes said. "Either volunteers from Northrop, Lockheed Martin or Boeing will do the work or possibly, we'll have to hire a contractor somewhere down the road."

The next order of business for the park's organizers is the 3,500 square foot building donated by Lockheed Martin.

The hangar was originally used at Lockheed's Ontario, Calif., plant and will now be used for aircraft restoration and maintenance. There will be some minor machine shop and restoration work capabilities. The shop is being put together with donations.

The Palmdale City Council has allocated \$160,000 for the Air Park for this fiscal year.

"Since the project is such a success and we are getting aircraft quicker than anyone

had planned for, the council is looking at accelerating improvements, so we could be looking for more money," said Hughes.

"I just want to thank the Victor Valley Economic Development Authority who donated the F-100 'The Spirit of Palmdale' and the F-105 that are already at the park," Ledford said. "The cooperation we are experiencing with this project is overwhelming.

"From all of the corporations that are here at Plant 42, to all of the current and retired employees, the spirit is high here in the city of Palmdale," said Ledford. "This event is what I believe, is going to be a long and proud discovery of our history here at Plant 42.

"The key component is, any plane that has been built by, worked on, built on or modified by workers in the Antelope Valley is eligible for placement here in the Air Park," said Ledford. "And it is quite an inventory. You can feel nothing but pride when you look at the accomplishments here in the Antelope Valley."

Ledford later added that anyone who wants to help ready the airplanes for the park should call Palmdale City Hall. Young people are especially welcome.

The city hopes to officially open the park when five aircraft are in place. Estimates are that this could be as soon as next year.