

Palmdale takes off to populate airpark

By **BOB WILSON**

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PALMDALE — Acquiring display models of the post-war 100 series of American fighter jets is the latest Palmdale City Council project.

Toward that end, the council has granted Mayor Jim Ledford the authority to sign any documents needed to acquire those and other surplus Air Force planes for the Plant 42 Heritage Airpark.

The city already is eyeing an F-100 and F-104 for the airpark, to be placed along the north side of Avenue P between 19th and 25th streets west.

Plans for the park show it extending from the west side of the entrance of Palmdale Regional Airport to the existing Blackbird Airpark, where a refurbished SR-71 Blackbird spy plane and one of its predecessors, an A-12 fighter

prototype, now rest.

The city is seeking five different models of 100-series jets, Ledford said. That series included the F-100 Super Sabre (built by North American Aviation), the F-101 Voodoo (McDonnell), the F-102 (Convair), the F-104 Starfighter (Lockheed), the F-105 Thunderchief (Republic Aviation), and the F-106 Delta Dart (Convair).

Some of the planes, such as the F-100s and F-104s, were built in Palmdale and flight-tested at Edwards Air Force Base. Others, such as the F-101s, were built elsewhere and tested locally.

Of the first five planes sought by the city, "All but one has been built, worked on, modified or something at Plant 42," Ledford said.

Acquiring the family of 100-series aircraft would be the first phase of the Heritage Airpark,

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AIRPARK: Plane acquisition first phase for Heritage park

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meant to display Plant 42's — and Palmdale's — rich aerospace history.

The airpark would join the Lancaster Aerospace Walk of Honor and the Edward Air Force Base historical museum as tourist attractions for fans of flight history, the mayor said.

It is hoped that the city will be able to find display models or mock-ups of 40 different aircraft that have been built, serviced or tested at Plant 42, including the F-117A stealth fighter, the B-2 stealth bomber and the space shuttle, Ledford said.

"Some of the planes, we know we can't get" because they are still in service, said Carol Seidl, assistant to City Manager Bob Toone and the head of the city task force charged with establishing the airpark.

Those planes would be represented by mock-ups until — and if — the real things become available, Seidl said.

To put the park together, the city has obtained "everything it takes to be a receiver of government-surplus property," Ledford said.

That property could come from

the military, from other cities to which it had been granted, or even private collectors, he said.

Twenty-three acres of Plant 42 property have been earmarked for the facility and is the focus of an ongoing environmental study by the Air Force, Seidl said.

That study must be completed before the Air Force can put the land under the city's control, she said. The city then will relocate the security fence around Plant 42 and establish a small construction road.

City officials hope to get the project under way in early 1998, about the same time the city is planning its inaugural annual dinner recognizing those who designed and built the planes, Seidl said.

"The worker bee is our focus," Ledford said. "We may unveil the F-100 at the first recognition event this spring."

"We are in the process of getting the F-100, which currently is at the former George Air Force Base" near Victorville, Seidl said. "They are going to let us have it, and we are going to repaint it."

An F-104 "already is available, is in town and has been repainted," she said. Its relocation remains de-

pendent on the dedication of the airpark land.

Contrary to conceptual drawings generated to determine if all 40 planes would fit in the space to be available for the Heritage Airpark, the 100-series planes probably will be parked next to craft in the Blackbird Airpark, she noted.

The plan is for future aircraft to be readied for viewing either by the companies that made them, by former employees of those companies, or by volunteers willing to donate their time and expertise, Ledford said.

As it develops, the airpark will be visible to motorists using a planned state Route 138 bypass intended to connect with the Antelope Valley Freeway at Avenue P-8, he said.

The airpark's placement also will "highlight the entryway to the (regional) airport and bolster tourism," he said. "It's part of a regional effort, but this will be specific to Plant 42."

To acquire the planes, the city will probably have to accept certain terms, such as agreeing to take them "as is" and provide for any disassembly and transportation costs, maintain them properly and use them only for display and

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**Jim Ledford,
Palmdale mayor**

educational purposes, agree not to restore them to flying condition, agree not to transfer or dispose of them without written consent, and indemnify the donor against any claims as well as provide the proper liability insurance.

"Because we can now receive government assets, we are in the loop" to go after surplus planes, in-

cluding some of those that used to rest at the defunct March Air Force Base near Riverside, Ledford said.

"We will be working with volunteers to bring the assets we find here — the volunteers will be a big part of this effort," he said.

Already on display in Palmdale — but on Lockheed property off-limits to the general public — are the company's F-104 Starfighter, the TR-1 version of its U-2 spy plane, and its record-holding SR-71.

Nearby are pedestal-mounted models of the F-80 Shooting Star, one of Lockheed's first jet aircraft, and the F-117A, one of its most recent production models.

The planes can be seen from Lockheed Way — essentially Sixth Street East — by driving north of Avenue P before reaching the Plant 42 guard gate.

Whether those planes can be made part of the Heritage Park remains to be seen, Ledford said.