

## **Update # 57 -“City of Savannah”**

B-17 Restoration

June 21, 2010

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There has been a great deal of activity surrounding the “*City of Savannah*” in the last few days. The most important event was the visit to Savannah by our good friend Gary Norville from American Aero Services in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. Gary has been associated with our project since the very beginning. As many of you know, his company conducts the annual maintenance on the Collings Foundations two flying WWII bombers, the B-17 “909”, and the B-24 “*Witchcraft*” – the last flying B-24 in existence. It would be hard to find anyone else who knows more about B-17’s. We are blessed that not only does Gary live only several hours from Savannah, but he is very interested in our project. This is the second time we have asked Gary to come to Savannah and inspect the “*City*”, and he didn’t let us down. We wanted his opinion on our plans and preparation for the application of the VpCI-427 anti-corrosion material to the “*City of Savannah’s*” interior, and the follow-on painting project. Gary spent most of the day with Deputy Project Manager Jim Grismer and Crew Chief Danny Harden, making an in-depth inspection of the fuselage and discussing application techniques. We are glad to report that he gave us good marks on our preparation and threw in some advice on addressing special problems we were having in the nose of the aircraft. Following the several hours spent inside the airplane, Gary met with Jim, Bill Burkel, Project Manager Jerry McLaughlin and Museum CEO Henry Skipper discussing possible equipment acquisitions to begin returning the “*City*” to its 1945 appearance. Plans were also made to send our carpentry team to New Smyrna Beach in November to follow up on our last visit, and to make final plans for new flooring in the “*City*” using templates of the floors from the “909”. Needless to say, just a half day with Gary moves our project a long way down the road to success.

On Friday of last week Jerry McLaughlin, was asked to present a “State of the Project” update to the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum Board of Directors. The Board was very pleased with Jerry’s report, which outlined the project’s Strategic Plan, our involvement with the War Bird restoration community, and the large amount of expertise that has been provided to the project by our volunteers, particularly the large group from Gulfstream Corporation and their subcontractors, as well as the many retired professionals who travel to Savannah from Sun City in South Carolina to work on the project. Jerry also made special mention of the fact that not only are these volunteers extremely talented, we have been blessed by the fact that they are all good people who work well together and believe in the spirit of the project – which makes his job much easier. He specifically mentioned volunteer David Piniger, who organized the major corporate support we have received from LMI Corporation in the form of engineering services that would have cost us well over \$25,000 if the work was conducted commercially.

Board members commented that they believe the project is proceeding well within expectations and applauded the performance of the volunteers who have done such a professional job in the first eighteen months of the project.

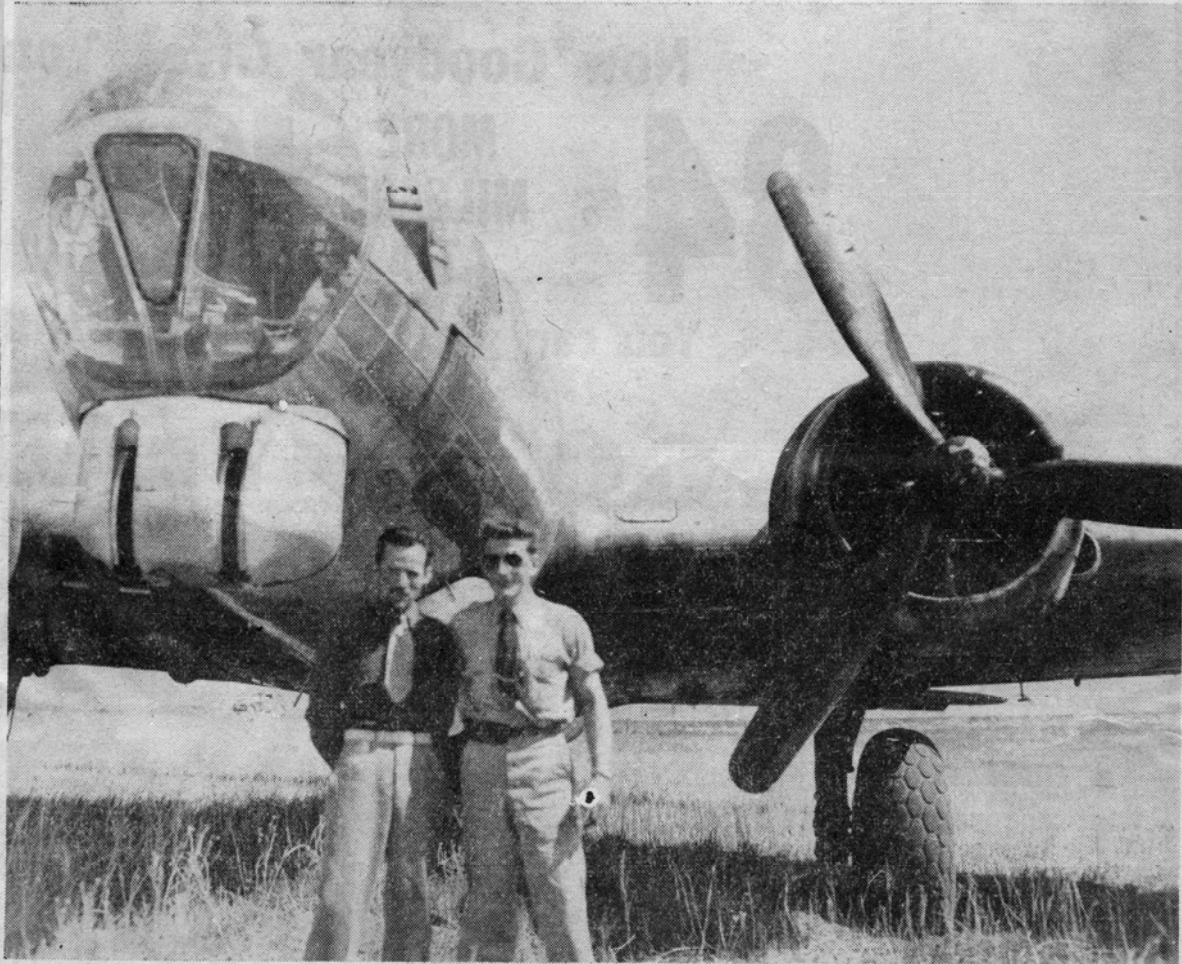
Those of you living in Savannah may have noticed the article in the Savannah Morning News last Friday noting the Museum's appreciation of LMI's support, and the WTOC-TV spot on Wednesday night highlighting the same subject.

Congratulations are in order for several of our volunteers who were promoted into leadership positions last week: Danny Harden has been named Crew Chief for the Wednesday Day Crew and Rocky Rodriguez is now the Crew Chief of the Saturday Crew. Rocky will be backed up on our largest crew by Deputy Crew Chief Dave Urbanski.

We are adding a little history to this week's update. In the two photos below you will see the B-17G 44-83814, now known as the "*City of Savannah*" landing at its first civilian home in Hazen, North Dakota, on June 11, 1947. At the controls of the aircraft were two brothers who owned the local airport, Lyle and Johnny Benz. Lyle was a WWII B-17 instructor pilot, Johnny had never previously flown in a B-17. Both men are still living in Hazen, but have not responded to requests for interviews.



## *Benz Brothers Fly B-17 to Hazen*



Shown here are Lyle Benz, left, and Johnny Benz owner-operators of the Hazen airport, just after they landed the giant 25-ton B-17 at the local airport, June 11. The two men, alone and unaided, put the four-motored bomber in flying shape, then flew it to Hazen from

Oklahoma with two stops enroute due to weather and engine troubles. Although the landing was successful, later on the same day, two propellers were bent when the plane hit a soft spot in taxiing to its parking place. The plane will be moved shortly to a permanent spot and is on display at the Hazen airport.

*More to come . . .*