



KENTUCKY AEROSPACE EDUCATION CENTER
Home of THE AVIATION MUSEUM OF KENTUCKY
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Kentucky Women in Aviation Exhibit Opens at The Aviation Museum of Kentucky *The New Exhibit Shares Stories and Artifacts to Inspire the Next Generation of Aerospace Leaders*

LEXINGTON, Ky. (May 18, 2026) — The Kentucky Aerospace Education Center (KAEC), home of The Aviation Museum of Kentucky (AMK), this week unveiled Kentucky Women in Aviation, a new featured exhibit sponsored by Signature Aviation. Nearly half of the 15 women featured in the exhibit were on-hand for a private ribbon-cutting event. The exhibit is now available for all Museum visitors during regular hours of operation.

The installation shares stories and artifacts that illustrate Kentucky women and their contributions, which helped shape aviation and aerospace in Kentucky, nationally and internationally. The stories range from pioneering pilots and wartime aviators to aerospace engineers, military leaders, educators, air traffic managers, and advocates who expanded opportunities for future generations.

Featured women include trailblazers such as Willa Brown Chappell, who helped train Tuskegee Airmen and broke barriers for African Americans and women in aviation; Lt. Col. Amy McGrath, the first woman Marine Corps pilot to fly a combat mission in an F/A-18; and Dr. Wilma Walker-Thompson, who helped establish Kentucky's first university aviation degree program.

The exhibit is especially compelling for its breadth. Alongside nationally recognized names are other remarkable Kentucky women whose stories reveal that women belong in the many facets of aerospace — from cockpit leadership and military service to engineering, cybersecurity, education, manufacturing, and community leadership.

Visitors will encounter stories of perseverance, innovation, and determination, including women who overcame racial barriers, physical disabilities, wartime restrictions, and industry stereotypes to pursue their passion for flight and aerospace. Together, the exhibit creates a powerful portrait of how women have shaped, and continue to shape, Kentucky's aviation and aerospace legacy.

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We're pleased to share that this exhibit also represents a glimpse of the future for Kentucky Aerospace Education Center, said KAEC Executive Director Tristen Chesser. As we release these remarkable profiles within our historic museum, we are finalizing plans for an expansive new facility that will highlight all of our collections in a more dynamic setting. New classrooms and flexible spaces will enable us to expand our aerospace education programs so more people can explore aviation and aerospace careers.

KAEC's mission is to expand access to hands-on aerospace education and strengthen Kentucky's workforce pipeline in one of the state's fastest-growing industries. Aerospace is a major economic driver for Kentucky, creating demand for highly skilled professionals across fields such as aviation maintenance, engineering, logistics, and advanced manufacturing. KAEC is working to meet that need by connecting education to real-world career pathways.

"Representation matters," said Rebecca Wishnevski, education director. "When young people see individuals who look like them succeeding in these roles, it changes what they believe is possible. This exhibit helps open those doors.

KAEC is currently advancing a capital campaign to support development of the new facility, which will be located on Blue Grass Airport property at the corner of Man O' War Boulevard and Airport Road. For more information on how to support this effort, contact Tristen Chesser at tchesser@aviationky.org or 859-231-1219.

The Aviation Museum of Kentucky is open Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. and Sundays 1 p.m. - 5 p.m. It is closed on Mondays and major holidays. Plan your visit with more details available at aviationky.org.

About Kentucky Aerospace Education Center (KAEC)

Kentucky Aerospace Education Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring and preparing the next generation of aerospace professionals through hands-on education, immersive experiences, workforce development, and community engagement. Working in partnership with industry, educators, and civic leaders, KAEC helps students and families explore opportunities in aviation, engineering, manufacturing, space technology, and emerging aerospace fields while strengthening Kentucky's future workforce and innovation economy.

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About The Aviation Museum of Kentucky (AMK)

The Aviation Museum of Kentucky, an initiative of KAEC, preserves and shares the stories, people, and innovations that shaped Kentucky aviation history. Located on Blue Grass Airport property in Lexington, the Museum features historic aircraft, exhibits, educational programming, and the Kentucky Aviation Hall of Fame, offering visitors of all ages opportunities to explore the legacy and impact of aviation in Kentucky and beyond. Opened in 1995, it is the official aviation museum of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

About Signature Aviation, Exhibit Sponsor

Signature Aviation is a global leader in private aviation services and one of the world's largest networks of fixed-base operations (FBOs), supporting travelers, flight crews, and aircraft operations at airports across the country and around the world. Through its commitment to aviation education, workforce development, and community engagement, Signature Aviation continues to invest in opportunities that inspire and prepare the next generation of aviation and aerospace professionals.

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