



ELIZABETH CITY AREA CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

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## **Coast Guard Exhibit Takes Flight in Elizabeth City, N.C. *Museum of the Albemarle opens Out of the Blue: Coast Guard Aviation, a tribute to U.S. Maritime Guardians***

(Elizabeth City, N.C., Oct. 5, 2009) – A sea of U.S. Coast Guard dignitaries, active and retired guardsmen and distinguished guests gathered in Elizabeth City, N.C., this past weekend when the Museum of the Albemarle opened *Out of the Blue: Coast Guard Aviation*, an exhibit honoring the nation’s maritime guardians. A special museum feature for the next five years, the exhibit navigates two centuries of U.S. Coast Guard history from its 1790 beginnings to its aviation presence in northeastern North Carolina today.

“This is a great day for Elizabeth City, the Museum of the Albemarle—and the U.S. Coast Guard,” said Museum of the Albemarle Administrator Ed Merrell. “This exhibit will help people understand what these men and women do every day, laying their lives on the line.”

A featured speaker, Sergei Sikorsky, son of Igor Sikorsky, relayed memories of his father, an aviation pioneer in the development of helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft. Retired Commander Stewart Graham, Coast Guard Aviator #2, spoke of his role in the early history of helicopter development in Elizabeth City. Retired Commander Bruce Melnick told about becoming the first Coast Guardsman astronaut. And a Coast Guard helicopter from Air Station Elizabeth City deployed a dramatic search and rescue demonstration on the Pasquotank River—within sight of the museum.

The weekend also drew approximately 300 Coast Guard aviators to Elizabeth City for the Ancient Order of the Pterodactyl's yearly "roost," a reunion of the fraternal group.

### ***Out of the Blue: Coast Guard Aviation***

While the opening day programs and events were impressive, it was the exhibit itself that thrilled guests most.

Utilizing historic photographs, artifacts, interactive exhibits and a unique display of timelines, *Out of the Blue: Coast Guard Aviation* provides a thoughtful look at U.S. Coast Guard history, with an emphasis on aviation and special concentration on Air Station Elizabeth City.

The origins of the U.S. Coast Guard date to Aug. 4, 1790, when Congress authorized the construction of 10 sea-going vessels to enforce tariff and trade laws and to prevent smuggling. Soon after, the service became known as the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service. The U.S. Coast Guard received its present name in 1915, when the Revenue Cutter Service merged with the U.S. Life Saving Service, making a single maritime service dedicated to saving life at sea and enforcing the nation's maritime laws.

*Out of the Blue* relays this early history with displays of such artifacts as a Revenue Cutter Service uniform; a breeches buoy, Lyle gun and faking box used for life-saving rescues at sea; and a replica of the Wade Point Lighthouse, which once served the Pasquotank River.

Soon after Wilbur and Orville Wright made aviation history in Kitty Hawk, the Coast Guard embraced the use of aviation. Posted on the wing flap of a C-130 is a timeline of fixed wing aviation from 1915 to 1956. Photographs of numerous aviation pioneers are featured, including Coast Guard Aviator #1 Elmer Stone, a founder of the Coast Guard aviation program and a pilot aboard the first transatlantic flight of any aircraft in 1919.

The blade of a Sikorsky H-60 Jayhawk helicopter carries the story of rotary wing aviation from 1957 to 1994. Exhibit-goers will see such search and rescue artifacts as a rescue basket, survival barrel, cargo parachute and a mannequin outfitted in a rescue diver's suit.

A life raft on the center of the exhibit floor is a focal point for kids, who may climb inside to watch real-life rescue videos. It was used in the 2006 motion picture, "The Guardian," portions of which were filmed in Elizabeth City.

And then there's "Jay," a one-third scale replica of an H-60 Jayhawk helicopter. The whimsical, cartoon-like chopper, designed by Elizabeth City artist and retired Coast Guardsman Doug Lane, features a number of fun "learn-by-doing" tasks. Kids can push a button to operate the tail rotor and hoist items to safety using a life basket.

Also of note are mannequins outfitted in Coast Guard dress for specific operations related to the Elizabeth City base, and a large flip book with descriptions, patches and photographs of the active U.S. Coast Guard stations, from Kodiak Island, Alaska, to Elizabeth City.

### **Cooperation Makes Exhibit a Success**

It wasn't long after the Museum of the Albemarle opened its permanent "Our Story" gallery in 2008, that the staff began plans to transform an unused museum wing for *Out of the Blue*.

"We have seen fantastic cooperation from the U.S. Coast Guard headquarters in Washington D.C., the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn., and all of the active U.S. bases," said Merrell.

All five Commanders from the U.S. Coast Guard base in Elizabeth City advised on the exhibition, with assistance from active duty and civilian staff. Aviation companies, such as Sikorsky and Lockheed Martin, provided artifacts and help as well.

*Out of the Blue: Coast Guard Aviation* can be seen through 2014 at the Museum of the Albemarle ([www.museumofthealbemarle.com](http://www.museumofthealbemarle.com)), located at 501 South Water Street in Elizabeth City, N.C. The northeastern regional branch of the North Carolina Museum of History, the museum interprets the history of 13 counties in northeastern North Carolina, considered by many to be the birthplace of English America. Admission is free. The museum is open Tuesday through

Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sundays from 2 to 5 p.m. For information, call (252) 335-1453.

### **About Elizabeth City**

Known as the “Harbor of Hospitality®,” Elizabeth City ([www.DiscoverElizabethCity.com](http://www.DiscoverElizabethCity.com)) is located in northeastern North Carolina on the Pasquotank River, halfway between Norfolk, Va., and the Outer Banks. The city is home to one of the U.S. Coast Guard’s busiest bases, with five commands. For visitors, Elizabeth City offers six National Register Historic Districts; Museum of the Albemarle; The Center, headquarters for Arts of the Albemarle’s new gallery, theatre and studio space; Elizabeth City State University Planetarium; and Port Discover Hands-on Science Center. Nature-based travelers are drawn to the area’s proximity to the Dismal Swamp and the abundance of outdoor recreational offerings. For additional information, call Elizabeth City Area Convention & Visitors Bureau at 1-866-ECity-4U (1-866-324-8948) or (252) 335-5330.

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