



Courtesy  
An artist rendering of Douglas Lochner's proposed veterans memorial sculpture for Santa Barbara Airport

## Angel Wings at the Airport

\$1 Million Public Art Project to Commemorate WWII Vets and Santa Barbara Marine Corps Air Station

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by TYLER HAYDEN (CONTACT)

To remember the days when the Santa Barbara Airport was a U.S. Marine Corps training center for fighter pilots and bomber squadrons, and to honor the American men and women who put their lives on hold or on the line to fight WWII, a memorial sculpture is planned for the front walkways of the airport's new terminal.

Two 20-foot-tall wings, each composed of six overlapping "feathers" made with laminated glass, would sit perpendicular to each other at the intersection of two footpaths, gently curving inward and allowing visitors to pass under. At night, they'd be illuminated from below with LED lights.

The project — designed by Ojai Valley artist [Douglas Lochner](#) — gained preliminary approval from the city's Architectural Board of Review (ABR) this week and, though it's received unanimous support from veterans groups, arts associations, and airport administrators, must keep running the gauntlet of oversight committees before it's fabricated. Up next is the Planning Commission then back to the ABR for final approval.

Lochner worked closely for two years with John Blankenship, founder of the [Pierre Claeysens Veterans Museum](#), and Karen Ramsdell, airport director, to settle on a design. The whole project is expected to cost around \$1 million, the funds being raised by Blankenship and his organization. Blankenship said he hopes to have the money and approvals in place by next year, with installation coming in spring 2013.

It's stunning, said Blankenship, how few area residents know that the airport was a training facility for Marine pilots from 1942-1946. It was established, he explained, as the U.S. government was building military bases up and down the West Coast to better supply troops and equipment for the Pacific Campaign. The pilots who practiced in Santa Barbara would deploy to carriers and other airfields. When the war ended, the airport went back to commercial and civilian use.

Lochner, who sold his technology consulting firm in 2006 to become a creator of public art, said the proposed sculpture's design is inspired not by conflict but by the good in people. "I wanted it to be uplifting," he said, "to show the best of the human spirit." He explained, there's no war imagery in the piece (no planes, no guns, no Marine Corps globe and eagle) so that the focus is honoring the personal sacrifice so many made — a giving of themselves, an angelic act.

"The sculpture is to celebrate that," said Lochner. "It shows a coming together for common good," he went on, noting he was unsure how veterans would interpret his approach. "Most consider themselves warriors. But I see them as angels. Not in a religious sense but in a testament to the human spirit." The glass medium, he said, complements that intangible, ethereal interpretation. "The fact that [veterans] embraced that and saw the value was thrilling," said Lochner.