

## A new set of wings : Board considers WWII veterans sculpture for airport

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The Santa Barbara Airport Commission may soon be one step closer to fulfilling its ambition to artistically commemorate the men and women who served in World War II at the airport, which was once the site of the Santa Barbara Marine Corps Air Station.

Plans will be presented to the Santa Barbara Architectural Board of Review today for approval of a 20-foot-high glass structure shaped to resemble wings that will be constructed in an arch where a knoll of grass currently sits in front of the new terminal.



A rendering shows a proposed memorial to the men and women who served in World War II, in front of Santa Barbara Airport. COURTESY IMAGE

If the board gives the project a green light, the Pierre Claeysens Veterans' Museum and Library Foundation will begin raising the \$1 million in private funds necessary to make the plan a reality, said John Blankenship, foundation founder and executive committee member.

"We're dedicated to stay with it and get it done," he said.

Mr. Blankenship said the foundation worried that as time went on, people would forget that the airport was a Marine Corps facility from 1942 to 1946. And even though a World War II memorial was dedicated on the airport site in 2009, it is tucked away past the long-term parking lots. The foundation wants something more visible, artistic and unique.

He said that when the foundation executive committee first saw the current design, "It caught our imagination; it caught the city's imagination."

The artist behind the rendering, Douglas Lochner, said because war is such a sensitive subject, he wanted to make sure he got the project right. He said he talked to many veterans, went through hundreds of old photographs and war memorabilia and researched what others had done to memorialize the Second World War.

The idea finally came to him as he pulled himself away from all the objects and contemplated what was distinctive about veterans who served in the era compared to other conflicts.

"I thought they were much more like angels," he said.

He told the News-Press that because many men and women who served in World War II left their families, farms, careers and schools to fight a distant war, most were not soldiers by occupation but rather selfless servants.

"They chose the path as love for their country and love for other humans. They helped bring peace back into the world," said Mr. Lochner.

He said he liked the idea of creating an uplifting, honoring piece that would resonate with an angelic spirit and highlight positive qualities of people.

The two wings, each to be made of six "feathers" of glass overlapping to create an archway for people to walk through, combine concepts of flight, the Marine Corps eagle symbol and angel wings, he said.

Mr. Lochner, whose preferred medium is glass, said the sculpture will be lit at night with LED edge lights to give the transparent, glass structure a "subtle, very pleasing, ethereal quality."

Not only will it be visually enchanting, it will be a feat of engineering.

"It's pushing the limits of architectural, structural glass," he said.

Though Mr. Lochner was worried at first that the veterans would not like being represented as angels rather than warriors, the design has been met with much enthusiasm.

"It illustrates aviation in my mind with a flowing and rising set of stylized wings. We think it's a first-class thing," said retired Lt. Col. Jack Harris, a foundation executive committee member and former Marine Corps fighter pilot.

"The idea of a tribute to World War II Marine Corps aviators really struck a chord with me," said Peter Schenck, commandant of the Santa Barbara Marine Corps League.

"I have a very strong feeling that the veterans of World War II really saved this world. Every time I see one, I thank them."

Executive committee member Dr. Adam Lewis said this year is particularly significant because it is the 100th anniversary of Marine Corps aviation and the 70th anniversary of the year the Marines first came to Santa Barbara for training at the base.

He said after Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, the military had an urgent need for training and service facilities on the West Coast.

The base covered most of the area from north Hollister Avenue to the ocean, between Los Carneros Road and Fairview. Aviators received advanced flight training, formed and reformed squadrons and were deployed for combat assignments in the Pacific from the site.

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