



Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum Project 501c3 Nonprofit Cave Junction, Oregon

Gary Buck - President
541 592-2055

Roger Brandt - Secretary
541 592-4316

Press Release

June 12, 2009

Preservation work to begin on historic smokejumper parachute loft

Cave Junction, Oregon

Preservation work on the nation's oldest smokejumper parachute loft will take place during a week-long effort in late June. The work will be done by local community volunteers and a crew of retired smokejumpers, some of which were involved in construction of the building in 1950. Efforts will focus on repair of windows and window sills, stabilizing the shingle siding, and scraping paint to prepare the building for painting.

The crews of volunteers will be working on the building from June 22-26, 2009. Additional information about the project will be available on the Highway199.org website.

The historic parachute loft is located on Smokejumper Way at the Illinois Valley Airport about four and a half miles south of Cave Junction. A display about the smokejumper loft and historic Siskiyou Smokejumper Base will be set up at the work site next to the parachute loft. Anyone interested in helping are welcome.

Parachute lofts are generally considered to be the "heart" of smokejumper operations because every smokejumper's life depends on what happens in this building. This is the place where parachutes are inspected, repaired, packed, and certified by a specialist for use by fire fighters who parachute into the wilderness to fight wild fire.

In the early history of smokejumping, a time when the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base parachute loft was constructed, all of the essential operations were housed in the parachute loftg. This included the administration office, dispatch center, storage area, an inspection tower, a repair room, and a ready room where jump suits and parachute packs were ready for fire fighters to grab and run for the airplane that took them to fight wild fires in remote wilderness areas.

The purpose of smokejumping is to get fire fighters to wild fires quickly while they are still small and easy to put out. This way, two or three people can put out the fire before it gets out of control and becomes a catastrophic event that might cost millions of dollars and require hundreds of fire fighters to control it.

Smokejumping began in the United States in 1939 with the first experimental jumps made at Winthrop, Washington. The first base was established in Montana in 1940 and, in 1943, two new bases were established; one in McCall, Idaho and the other in Cave Junction, Oregon. During the next two decades, the bases in Montana, Idaho, and Washington were moved and the original buildings destroyed. The Siskiyou Smokejumper Base is the last of the original smokejumper bases in American history still standing in its original location with its original buildings.

The Siskiyou Smokejumper Base is the first aerial fire fighting operation in Oregon history. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005.

Preservation work on the historic parachute loft has been funded by community businesses and residents and organized by the Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum Project, a nonprofit group of community volunteers interested in preserving the history of the base and buildings as a cultural heritage tourist attraction. The long-term plans of the group includes setting up a visitor center and gift store in the historic smokejumper mess hall, establishing waysides in different locations around the grounds for a self guided tour of the base, and a museum about smokejumping, the role it played in homefront defense during World War Two, and the adventures that smokejumpers experienced parachuting into remote regions to fight forest fires.

The Illinois Valley Airport and historic smokejumper base are property of Josephine County. The County Commissioners unanimously approved the project now being organized and funded by community volunteers. The Oregon State Historic Preservation Office provided consultation and guidance for the preservation work to be done on the historic parachute loft.

The project leaders hope to organize another work week next summer to install a new roof on the historic parachute loft.

---END---

For more information:

Gary Buck: 541 592-2055



(Left) Parachute loft construction nearing completion (1950). (Right) Parachute loft in 2005