

WRIGHT PATTERSON OSC'S SERVICE TO THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE U.S. AIR FORCE:

THE HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM GUIDES

by Beverly Smith

In June of 1972, Col. Bernie Bass, director of the Air Force Museum, realized a need for volunteers and also an opportunity for the Officers' Wives Club (OWC) to be involved at the Museum. He requested assistance from the OWC to provide instructive and informational tours to the scheduled school groups arriving at the museum for field trips. The response to this request was overwhelming with more than 50 OWC members volunteering for this assignment. After attending several informational training sessions, the OWC Museum Guides were ready to meet the challenge of leading the school children through the museum. These ladies were the first volunteers at the museum, and at that time, there was no Education Division or Volunteer program. Here we are, almost 50 years later and still guiding students through the museum.

The Museum Guides were ready to take on more challenges. In 1979, Col. Richard Upstrom, Museum Director, asked if the OWC Guides would be interested in a summer job. The proposed job would involve touring visitors through the restoration facility. After a short training, these tours began in June 1981 with three volunteer guides and 30 visitors. We had the unique privilege to share the restoration of two memorable B-17's, both with honored WWII records; Memphis Belle and the Swoose. In 2017 our members again adapted when tours inside the restoration facility were replaced with Glimpse Behind the Scenes Tours. Using the technology inside the Space STEM node in the 4th building visitors can view restoration details from inside the museum. GBS tours are offered every first and third Friday throughout the year.

The mission of the OWC guides is continually changing. In the spring of 1996, a Storytime program was established for three to five-year olds. A few short stories centering on aviation or space are read, and the visit ends with a tour. Just imagine the amazement of the youngest visitors to the museum as they view some of the largest airplanes displayed such as the B-52.

Some Guides are trained to tour visitors who are visually impaired, hearing impaired, or those with special needs, each requiring a different method of conducting the tour. For touring the visually impaired visitors, we must wear white gloves in order to explore the aircraft. Wearing the gloves keeps the oils from the hands off the aircraft. We are allowed to enter some of the display areas to conduct the "touch tour". Touring in this manner allows the visually impaired to experience the wonders of the Museum in a different manner as a unique learning experience.

Training for OSC guides is an ongoing process. There are at least six E & T (Enrichment and Training) sessions scheduled, usually from September to March. These sessions include invited lecturers, visits to aviation sites, and there was one special trip to Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama. Last year our E&Ts included the Apollo 11 exhibit at the Cincinnati Museum Center and private tours of the Wright Brothers National Museum and the Miami Valley Veteran's Museum.

The Dayton Ohio area has a rich aviation history. What a privilege to share the "stories" of the NMUSAF with visitors from around the world. The next time you see volunteers in blue "pinnies" with airplane pins attached, ask them about the meaning of the pins. Each pin is earned for hours dedicated to the program or special duties within the program. We are honored to be part of this amazing museum for 40 years and take pride in being able to relate the many stories of courage and honor which are depicted through the displays in the museum.