




Hundreds of planes expected at fall event at Groton-New London Airport

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Groton — The equivalent of an auto show for aircraft enthusiasts could bring up to 600 planes and a few thousand people to the area this fall.

The Groton-New London Airport will be host over Columbus Day weekend to one of only four so-called fly-ins happening around the country. The two-day event is being put on by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, the largest aviation association in the world with about 320,000 members nationwide.

Franz Edson, a local pilot and former director at Electric Boat who was instrumental in bringing the event to the area, said the airport's proposal highlighted the area's attractions such as the Mystic Seaport, the casinos, and the Submarine Force Museum and Historic Ship Nautilus. The idea is to get pilots and their families to see all that the area has to offer so that they hopefully come back, Edson said last week.

"A lot of people don't know what this area has to offer," he added.

Pilots will show off their aircrafts, and everything from pilot glasses to airplanes will be sold at the event. Part of the goal is to get more youth involved and interested in aviation, which is more popular among an older crowd, organizers said.

Depending on weather, organizers are expecting between 500 and 600 planes, and about 5,000 people. Between 300 to 500 volunteers will also be needed.

It will be free and open to the public but is catered to aviation enthusiasts. At a preliminary meeting of stakeholders, organizers stressed that it is not an air show and that there will be a limited number of flyovers. They are targeting those who live within 500 to 700 miles of the area.

Sites are selected based on location, airport capacity and the relationship between the aviation community, the airport and the businesses at the airfield.

Chris Eads, the association's director of outreach and events, said the group spends about \$180,000 to put on these events, including in-kind trades and sponsorships. The group estimates the economic impact back to the community is between \$500,000 and \$680,000.

Edson said he's blocked off more than 500 rooms at some of the area's hotels, "and I'm not done yet."

Town of Groton Mayor Bruce Flax is calling the event a "home run."

"It's great to bring people who don't normally visit southeastern Connecticut to our little corner for an event like this," Flax said. "Hopefully they'll stay longer than just the event or make a return in the future."

The event will also help to show off "the strong facilities that we have worked hard to develop and maintain at the airport," said Kevin Dillon, executive director of the Connecticut Airport Authority.

Anyone interested in getting more information about the event is asked to email Franz Edson at f.edson@sbcglobal.net (mailto:f.edson@sbcglobal.net).

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