

## Media

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## First Flight Foundation Gives Wings to Partnership with N.C. Museum of History



**RALEIGH, N.C.** — Through a generous donation by the First Flight Foundation, visitors to the North Carolina Museum of History have the chance to see one of the largest collections of Wright brothers' aircraft on display outside of the Smithsonian.

The First Flight Foundation provided funds to move and install the 1903 Wright Flyer in the museum's lobby. The Flyer, on loan during renovations at the Wright Brothers National Memorial in Kill Devil Hills, hangs 12 feet off the ground — the same height as the first flight. The Flyer joins the 1911 Wright Glider in the Museum of History's lobby. The Wright Glider was funded by a grant from the Foundation to the museum and installed in 2014.

The Foundation also lit up the morning of nearly 50 Tar Heel Junior Historian Association club members, as well as museum staff, on May 23, with a presentation by Darrell Collins, one of the foremost experts on the Wright brothers and their aircraft. The presentation included an interactive segment on constructing and flying paper airplanes. A 40-year veteran of the National Park Service, Collins later presented to the N.C. Museum of History Foundation that afternoon, "The Wright-North Carolina Story, An American Story." Collins is recognized as one of the world's top five experts on the Wright brothers and early aviation history, and has represented the National Park Service and Wright Brothers National Memorial nationally and internationally, speaking on the Wrights' work and legacy.

During this presentation, David Hallac, National Park Service-Outer Banks Group Superintendent, discussed the partnership with the Museum to prevent the Flyer from being stored away for two years during the restoration of the Wright Brothers National Monument visitor center. The display of the flyer in the museum ensures the continued telling of the Wright Brothers' story, and makes the flyer available to new audiences in the piedmont. "Other entities were proposed to temporarily relocate the Flyer, but the First Flight Foundation was adamant that it not leave the state of North Carolina. The museum was the perfect partner," said Karen Warlitner, Executive Director of the First Flight Foundation.

The 1903 Flyer is referred to as the Combs Flyer; it was commissioned by Harry Combs, aviation pioneer, as a gift to the Wright Brothers National Memorial for the 2003 centennial of the First Flight. Combs traveled with astronaut Dr. Neil Armstrong to the Memorial on several occasions. Despite health conditions, he willed himself to make it to the centennial on December 17, 2003, and died just six days later. Combs was former president of Gates Learjet Corporation, and named one of the century's 100 aviation leaders.

The event and program was a collaboration between the North Carolina Museum of History, the First Flight Foundation, and the National Park Service-Outer Banks Group.

Why does the story of the first flight still spark wonder? "It changed the world. It's that simple," said Will Plentl, President of the First Flight Foundation. "Wilbur and Orville Wright persisted until they made aviation a reality." He added, "We had the fantastic opportunity to house the Flyer here. It's a true partnership between the Foundation and the Museum of History, for all North Carolinians."

Rear Admiral Ferg Norton, Vice President of the First Flight Foundation, shared his thoughts. "It's a true, great American and North Carolina story, and we're excited the museum can tell it in its entirety." He added, "But there's nothing like Kill Devil Hills to really envision what they had to work with."

John Harris, a lifelong hang glider and former president of the First Flight Foundation, said, "The story of the Wright brothers will resonate for generations." He added with a smile, "If students learn to read and pay attention to their math, they can do anything."

"The flights of the Wright brothers in North Carolina are some of the most important events in our state's history," said Ken Howard, Director of the N.C. Museum of History. "We're excited to be working with the National Park Service to provide a temporary home for their reproduction of the Wright brothers' 1903 Flyer while the Wright Brothers National Memorial Visitor Center is remodeled."

Museum visitors are encouraged to take in the story of the Wright brothers in the signature exhibit The Story of North Carolina, see the 1903 Wright Flyer and visit Kill Devil Hills to experience the windswept dunes where the first flight took place.

For information about the N.C. Museum of History, a Smithsonian-affiliated museum, call 919-807-7900 or access [ncmuseumofhistory.org](http://ncmuseumofhistory.org) or follow on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+ or YouTube.

## **IMAGE CAPTIONS**

**Image Link:** [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ud6f4ffrd2mzz21/AAA8Jh4DnTK3qjpGAMP\\_qL0ha?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ud6f4ffrd2mzz21/AAA8Jh4DnTK3qjpGAMP_qL0ha?dl=0)

First on left: the 1903 Wright flyer and 1911 Wright glider hang in the Museum of History's lobby; Darrell Collins presents to Tar Heel Junior Historian Association club members in Daniel's Auditorium; Members of the First Flight Foundation, the National Park Service-Outer Banks Group, N.C. Museum of History, and N.C. Museum of History Foundation in the Museum of History's lobby

## **About the N.C. Museum of History**

The N.C. Museum of History is located at 5 E. Edenton Street in downtown Raleigh. Hours are Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. The museum collects and preserves artifacts of North Carolina history and educates the public on the history of the state and the nation through exhibits and educational programs. Each year more than 400,000 people visit the museum to see some of the 150,000 artifacts in the museum collection. The Museum of History, within the Division of State History Museums, is part of the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

### **About the First Flight Foundation**

The First Flight Foundation, formerly known as the First Flight Centennial Foundation, continues as a private, non-profit organization whose mission is to Champion the Legacy of the Wright brothers. To fulfill the mission of championing the legacy of the Wright brothers, the foundation has set the following initiatives: to protect and preserve the monument; to advocate for the Wrights' lifelong work and their place in history; to educate the public and increase awareness of the Wrights' and their work's impact on aviation, science, engineering, history; and humanity; and to collaborate and partner with other Wright entities to preserve and share their enduring gift of flight to the world.

### **About the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources**

The N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (NCDNCR) is the state agency with a vision to be the leader in using the state's natural and cultural resources to build the social, cultural, educational and economic future of North Carolina. NCDNCR's mission is to improve the quality of life in our state by creating opportunities to experience excellence in the arts, history, libraries and nature in North Carolina by stimulating learning, inspiring creativity, preserving the state's history, conserving the state's natural heritage, encouraging recreation and cultural tourism, and promoting economic development.

NCDNCR includes 27 historic sites, seven history museums, two art museums, two science museums, three aquariums and Jennette's Pier, 39 state parks and recreation areas, the N.C. Zoo, the nation's first state-supported Symphony Orchestra, the State Library, the State Archives, the N.C. Arts Council, State Preservation Office and the Office of State Archaeology, along with the Division of Land and Water Stewardship. For more information, please call 919-807-7300 or visit [www.ncdcr.gov](http://www.ncdcr.gov).