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Wings Over Washington Airshow Finds New Home

The annual event was canceled last year following noise and safety complaints from area residents.

By [Meg Godlewski](#)

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The annual Wings Over Washington Air Show will be held this year at Bremerton National Airport (KWPT). [Credit: Shutterstock]

The Wings Over Washington Air Show is back—with a diversion. This year the event will be held at Bremerton National Airport (KWPT). In previous years the event was held at Tacoma Narrows Airport (KTIW) in Gig Harbor some 15 miles to the southeast of Bremerton.

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The annual event used to be held on July 4 and combined an airshow over the Tacoma waterfront with a car show and aircraft on static display at KTIW. Billed as family-friendly entertainment, the event was popular with nonprofit organizations and clubs as the combination aircraft static display, car show, food vendors, and beer garden attracted thousands of people.

Last year the event was bumped to August. Then, just a few weeks before the event was slated to happen, it was canceled in part because airport sponsor Pierce County was concerned about complaints from residents in the area about noise and safety issues. In addition, the two largest businesses on the airport, Narrows Aviation, a fixed base operator catering to corporate aircraft, and Pavco Flight Center, a busy Part 141 flight school, objected to the disruption the event would cause to their businesses, and declined to allow their ramps to be used for the event.

It was disappointing, says Tony LaStrella, the president and CEO of the Freedom Fair and the Tacoma Events Commission. Then the Port of Bremerton reached out with the idea of bringing the aviation event to the Bremerton National Airport (KPWT), some 15 miles northeast of Tacoma Narrows.

“When God closes a door somewhere he opens a window. That’s what happened here,” LaStrella says, adding that the Bremerton location will make it possible for a much more interactive experience for the attendees.

“When we did the show at KTIW the airplanes flew over the waterfront of Tacoma. There was no way for the people there to meet the pilots,” he explained. “In addition, we had jets flying as part of the event and those jets needed more room to land than was available at KTIW. Bremerton has the room, and after the aircraft land people will be able to meet the pilots.”

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KPWT covers 1,729 acres and sports a 6,200-foot-by-150-foot runway. Tacoma Narrows sits on 568 acres and has a runway measuring 5002 by 100 feet.

The first airport at the Bremerton location was allegedly created in the 1930s by a group of pilots who filled in a bog with gravel. The airport was expanded and improved drastically to serve the needs of the U.S. Navy during World War II and the Cold War.

At the height of its use, KPWT had two runways: one aligned east-west, the other north-south. The latter remains today. The east-west runway was converted into a drag strip in the 1990s and is still used by Bremerton Motorsports park.

The City of Bremerton has been 'a Navy town' since the early 1900s. Puget Sound Naval Shipyard is still one of the largest employers in the city. Since September 11 the shipyard has been under a National Security Area. The facility often maintains submarines, carriers and other vessels.

According to Jim Rothlin, the CEO of the Port of Bremerton, the area's Navy heritage will be celebrated at the event. "This is the first time in 35 years we have had an airshow like this and we're really looking forward to it. We're planning to have people out here looking at airplanes and cars, and to have booths with crafts, food and music. We are looking to do something that involves the whole community."

Aircraft Displays

Rothlin expects approximately 1,500 to 3,000 people to attend the event. Among the aircraft slated to be on display are a P-51 Mustang, an F4U Corsair, TBM Avenger, SBD Dauntless, PBX Catalina, and a T-28 Trojan.

For people looking for a more dynamic aviation experience, Olde Thyme Aviation, a Seattle-based company will be providing rides in vintage aircraft.

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All these things are made possible by ample space at the airport, noted Doug Fratoni, executive director of the Wings over Washington Airshow. “There is a larger static display area on the west side of the airport and we have built-in car parking on the east side of the airport on the dragstrip. We plan to have shuttles running to get people from the parking area to the show side.”

Franconi added that the airbox for performing aircraft is 3,000 feet wide by 6,000 feet long, which makes aircraft demonstrations possible in the future. “This is our first year at Bremerton and we’re just getting our feet wet. We’re hoping that we can have military demonstration teams in subsequent years.”

Both LaStrella and Fratoni say the Port of Bremerton and the Bremerton Pilot’s Association have been very supportive of the event and eager to participate. For example, the pilot’s association is running the car show, the proceeds of which go toward their aviation scholarship fund.

The [Wings Over Washington Air Show](#) is slated for August 19 and 20.



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