

Paton Field Centennial Moment—August

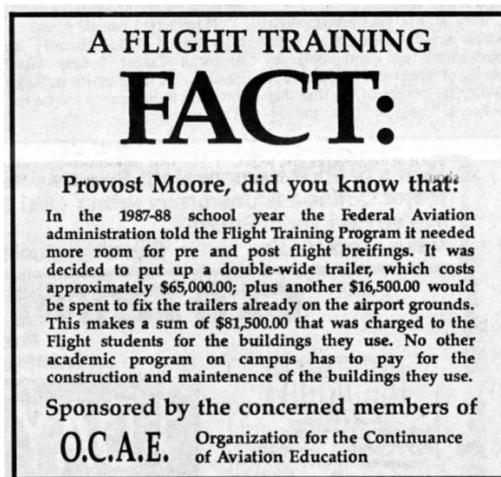
Airport Advocates

When the very existence and viability of both the airport and the flight program were challenged, strong advocates came forward. Here are two that stand out.

OCAE: Schwartz Administration (1989-1990)

In 1989, President Michael Schwartz suspended admissions to the flight program with plans for a subsequent review that could lead to abandonment of the program and the airport. Contributing to this decision was an increased emphasis on the liberal arts and research activity. Probably more pressing were financial issues, including a recent large legal settlement, and expressed resident discontent over the airport. Flight students, instructors, and parents reacted immediately.

The most notable and concerted effort came from the Organization for the Continuance of Aviation Education (OCAE). Formed by a group of flight majors, OCAE brought together flight majors, flight instructors, staff, faculty, and alumni.



**A FLIGHT TRAINING
FACT:**

Provost Moore, did you know that:

In the 1987-88 school year the Federal Aviation administration told the Flight Training Program it needed more room for pre and post flight briefings. It was decided to put up a double-wide trailer, which costs approximately \$65,000.00; plus another \$16,500.00 would be spent to fix the trailers already on the airport grounds. This makes a sum of \$81,500.00 that was charged to the Flight students for the buildings they use. No other academic program on campus has to pay for the construction and maintenance of the buildings they use.

Sponsored by the concerned members of
O.C.A.E. Organization for the Continuance
of Aviation Education

March 7, 1990, *Daily Kent Stater*

OCAE mobilized to gather information and develop solutions to maintain the program. An active letter-writing effort reached out to alumni, the aviation industry, and aviation professionals. Inquiries to other flight programs sought facts on their operations. The group effectively used the *Daily Kent Stater*, obtaining endorsements from the Undergraduate Student Senate, Inter-Fraternity Council, and Black United Students. Ads in the newspaper addressed directly to Provost Tom Moore highlighted facts about the flight training program.

Opposition from the FAA and the Ohio Bureau of Aviation to closure of the airport undoubtedly clarified the issue noting that the university would be in violation of grant agreements. Schwartz unexpectedly reinstated flight program admissions beginning in fall 1990.

Al Beckwith: Cartwright Administration (2001-2004)

When an FAA master planning process began in 2001 under President Cartwright, it revealed the university's interest in closing Paton Field and moving the flight program to the Portage County

Airport. With this disclosure, Al Beckwith, the airport's fixed base operator and a dedicated supporter, took action to gain support for keeping the airport in Stow and highlight its potential for spurring economic development.

To counter criticism from a group of local residents who were critical of airport operations and supported its closing, Beckwith formed the Friends of the Airport. He circulated a petition to stakeholders and fellow pilots for support and shared the results with Stow City Council, along with a report of the activity he saw drawn to the area by the airport. All this, he argued, demonstrated the airport's value to the community. The Munroe Falls Chamber of Commerce gave its support for retaining the airport and developing the surrounding site.

Despite the FAA stating that it would not support airport closure, the board of trustees voted in 2004 to decommission Paton Field and move air operations to a nearby airport. Beckwith and the Friends of the Airport persisted in their efforts to keep the airport in Stow, taking advantage of Aviation Day that fall to highlight the issue and engage the public's support.

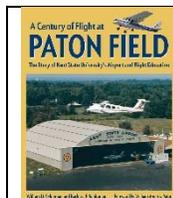


Button art, 2004. KSU Airport, Beckwith Collection

The issue of the airport's future was still unsettled going into Lefton's administration in 2006. After review, it was determined that a new FAA master plan was needed. This led to the plan approved in 2016 that keeps Paton Field operating in Stow. Regrettably, Al Beckwith, the airport's champion, died before the decision was finalized.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1987, Kent State had the fourth largest university flight school in the country. More than 200 students were taking flight courses, another 100 were enrolled in the program. There were four flight chiefs, seventy flight instructors, twenty-four planes. The airport had over 114,000 landings that year, making it the busiest small airport in the five-county area.



Excerpted from *A Century of Flight at Paton Field: The Story of Kent State University's Airport and Flight Education* by William D. Schloman and Barbara F. Schloman. (Kent State University Press, 2019). Used by permission. Available at the Kent State University Airport, from the [Kent State University Press](https://www.kent.edu/airport), and wherever books are sold.