

NAA NEWS

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Fay G. Wells Picked for Katharine B. Wright Award

One of aviation's grand ladies, Fay Gillis Wells, has been chosen to receive this year's Katharine B. Wright Award for her 70-plus years of promoting flying as a pilot, journalist, speaker, event-planner, and contributor to numerous projects and organizations.

Wells was one of four women who came up with the idea for The Ninety-Nines, a group of female aviators who got together for the first time in November 1929 at Curtiss Field on Long Island--the same site where Wells had learned to fly a few months earlier. The organization got its name from the number of charter members who signed up in response to recruitment efforts by Wells and the other founders. First president of The Ninety Nines was Amelia Earhart, whom Wells met while Wells was working as an airplane-salesman and with whom Wells developed a friendship.

In the 1930s, Wells spent time in Russia, where she honed her skills as a pilot, wrote free-lance articles on aviation, and helped make preparations for Wiley Post's round-the-world flight of 1933.

In 1941, following the disappearance of Amelia Earhart during a flight over the Pacific four years earlier, Fay Wells helped establish a scholarship fund to honor Earhart. In the 1960s, she successfully lobbied the Post Office for an Amelia Earhart air mail stamp.

In yet another tribute to Earhart, Wells co-chaired a project in the 1970s to create a Forest of Friendship at Atchison, Kansas, Amelia Earhart's birthplace. The concept of the park was to create a living memorial to aviation and space flight by planting trees from the countries of people who have advanced the cause of aerospace technology. To date, over 700 men and women from 36 countries have been selected for recognition in the park, whose name is taken from the first motto of The Ninety-Nines: "World Friendship through Flying." A gazebo in the park is dedicated to Fay Wells.

During her lifetime, Wells has been honored by multiple groups, including the OX5 Aviation Pioneers, the Women's International Association for Aeronautics, and the

National Society of Women Scientists and Engineers. She has also been previously honored by NAA, which named her the Association's Elder Statesman of 1984.

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Fay Gillis Wells

Outside of aviation, Wells earned respect as a White House correspondent covering Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter. In 1972, she was one of three female reporters chosen to accompany Nixon on his trip to China.

NAA will present Wells with the Katharine B. Wright Award for 2001 at the annual meeting of The Ninety-Nines in July.

The Katharine B. Wright Award was created in 1981 by the Gates Learjet Corporation to pay tribute to a woman who has made "a personal contribution to the advancement of the art, sport and science of aviation and space flight over an extended period of time" or who has "provided encouragement, support and inspiration to her husband and thus was instrumental in his success" in advancing aerospace knowledge.

NAA is a non-profit, membership organization devoted to fostering opportunities to participate fully in aviation activities and to promoting public understanding of the importance of aviation and space flight to the United States.