

Documentary on 1929 Women's Air Derby earns independent filmmaker 9th Annual Combs Gates Award

Aviation Hall of Fame enshrinees will present \$20,000 prize to Heather Taylor at NBAA Convention on October 11

(Dayton, OH - Sept. 6, 2011) The National Aviation Hall of Fame (NAHF) today announced the recipient of its Ninth Annual Combs Gates Award will be filmmaker Heather Taylor, of Columbia, Maryland. Taylor is being recognized for the documentary she directed and produced, *Breaking Through the Clouds: The First Women's National Air Derby*. Taylor will receive the \$20,000 cash award in a formal presentation on the morning of Tuesday, October 11, at a special opening session of the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) 64th Annual Meeting & Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Presenting Taylor her award will be NAHF President, Philip A. Roberts, accompanied by Hall of Fame enshrinees including former astronaut and the last man to walk on the moon, Eugene Cernan; business aviation pioneer and aerial cinematographer, Clay Lacy; and air show legends Bob Hoover and Sean D. Tucker.

Breaking Through the Clouds accurately documents the First Women's National Air Derby, a grueling nine-day race from Santa Monica, California to Cleveland, Ohio held in the summer of 1929. Taylor found that this gender-busting, front-page news-making event of the day had largely been lost to history, despite the now legendary status of many of its 20 competing pilots, such as Amelia Earhart, Pancho Barnes, and Louise Thaden. The film utilizes actual footage of the derby, much of it never before seen, as well as re-creations using the same aircraft types of the original participants.

Taylor spent 13 years researching, writing, producing and directing *Breaking Through the Clouds*, fulfilling her personal quest to see that these courageous pioneering women and their contributions to advancing aviation get the recognition and appreciation they deserve.

NBAA convention attendees are invited to stop by the Hall of Fame's show exhibit (#C-7135) after the award ceremony to meet Heather Taylor and view clips from her documentary.



The prestigious Combs Award grew out of a donation to the NAHF by the late Harry Combs, a 1996 enshrinee of the Hall of Fame. As part of his generous \$1.3 million gift for the creation of a NAHF research center, Combs stipulated that the Combs Award be established to encourage and support relevant aviation history research and preservation efforts. A panel of expert judges reviews each submission based upon criteria such as historical accuracy, creativity, potential for long-term impact, and value to the Hall of Fame mission of honoring America's outstanding air and space pioneers.

Combs was instrumental to the growth and development of business aviation. Consequently the NAHF partnered with the NBAA to host the award presentation at its annual meeting and convention, the largest purely civil aviation event in the world.

The inaugural award was presented at the Opening General Session of the NBAA Meeting & Convention in 2003, the 100th anniversary of the first powered flight.

John Gates and his sister, Diane G. Wallach, are co-trustees of the Gates Frontiers Fund, created by their late parents and philanthropists, Charles C. and June S. Gates. The late Mr. Gates, who passed away in 2005 at age 84, was a partner with Combs in several aviation businesses including the Combs Gates FBO chain and Gates Learjet. This year marks the ninth year for the award and the sixth year with the name changed to reflect a multi-year commitment by the Gates Frontiers Fund to fund the award.

The award pays homage to Gates' belief in the benefit of historic preservation and study, and to Combs' own research efforts behind his acclaimed 1979 book, *Kill Devil Hill: Discovering the Secrets of the Wright Brothers*. Combs was inspired to write the book after close friend and fellow enshrinee, Neil Armstrong, presented him a bound collection of the Wright Brothers' personal papers.

Combs died in December 2003 at age 90. During the inaugural award ceremony at the NBAA convention held a month before his passing, Combs remarked, "Just as Neil's gift inspired me to discover the secrets of the Wrights, I want to motivate a new generation of historians, researchers and preservationists to continue the process of clarifying and preserving our nation's amazing air and space history for generations to come."

To find out more about the NAHF or to secure an application for next year's Combs Gates Award, please contact the NAHF Harry B. Combs Research Department at (937) 256-0944.