



# CATALINA ISLAND CONSERVANCY™

## **Catalina Island Conservancy Reopens Runway at the Airport in the Sky**

*1947 DC-3 originally owned by Philip K. Wrigley is the first plane to land on the runway that Marines and Seabees repaired as a training exercise.*

**LONG BEACH** – (May 9, 2019) – The first plane – a 1947 DC-3 originally owned by Philip K. Wrigley – touched down at Airport in the Sky on the repaired runway at ACE Clearwater Airfield, May 3. The landing marked the culmination of a public-private partnership between the Conservancy and the Department of Defense, with the Marine Corps and the U.S. Navy rebuilding the runway as part of the Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) project. The Tiger Squadron, consisting of six Nanchang CJ6A planes flying in formation, followed the restored DC-3, while a P-38 Lightning and a B-25-Mitchell performed a high-speed fly by.

Military and elected officials, along with Catalina Island Conservancy leaders, celebrated the official opening of the runway at the newly-named airfield. Conservancy CEO Tony Budrovich presented official landing certificate #001 to Alison Wrigley Rusack and Geoff Rusack, owners of the restored DC-3 ‘WASP.’ Colby Harrison, representing State Senator Ben Allen, and Herlinda Chico, Field Deputy for LA County 4<sup>th</sup> District Supervisor Janice Hahn, presented proclamations to ACE Clearwater’s Kellie and Gary Johnson, naming rights donor at ACE Clearwater Airfield, and the California Department of Transportation’s Aeronautics Division, represented by Acting Chief Rob Bolyard and Safety Officer Patrick Miles. Proclamations were also presented to USMC Major Lisbeth Andriessen, US Navy Lieutenant Saul Perez, Marine Wing Support Group 37 Colonel Matthew Seay and Lieutenant Colonel Jed Bauch, I Marine Expeditionary Force Colonel David Nathanson, Lieutenant Colonel Duncan Buchanan, and Lt. General Joseph Osterman.

Finally, Acting Chief of the State of California’s Division of Aeronautics presented the official operating permit for Catalina Island Conservancy’s Airport in the Sky to Budrovich.

“We had some beautiful aeronautical moments here at the airport and are so appreciative of all of those who came today to celebrate this great accomplishment,” said Budrovich. “We had a wonderful experience working with the military from the first meeting to the end. They showed exemplary service and capabilities, and learned what it was like to work on Catalina. It’s a remote and sometimes difficult place to make things happen, but they had success. They stayed on schedule and did a fantastic job. We are so thankful for all of the partners that contributed to this project.”

Marines and Seabees, around 200 throughout the project, have been working on Catalina Island since December on the \$5 million Airport in the Sky runway repair project. They have faced challenging weather in the remote location, yet finished the ACE Clearwater Airfield repairs on schedule, replacing the main runway's asphalt with concrete. It provided the military with valuable construction training while benefiting the community of Catalina by ensuring the Island's only airport remains open to the public.

"When we get to Mission Complete on a project, it's very rewarding," said USMC Major Andriessen, who oversaw the Innovative Readiness Training project. "The priority of IRT is training, and this was a great opportunity for us to train and also have a huge impact on the community."

Units participating included I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) out of Camp Pendleton, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (3rd MAW) and Marine Wing Support Squadron 373 (MWSS-373) out of Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Naval Construction Group One (NCG1), First Naval Construction Regiment (1NCR) and Navy Mobility Construction Battalion (NCMB-25).

ACE Clearwater Airfield officially opened for public use at 3 p.m., May 3.

### **About the Airport in the Sky**

The Airport in the Sky is a historical and critical asset that provides access to Catalina Island via air for first responders, travelers, residents and businesses. The airport is the Island's U.S. Mail and UPS delivery hub. An estimated 3.5 million pounds of freight, which includes medical and emergency supplies, is also shipped through the airport annually. The airport opened in 1946, and the Catalina Island Conservancy took over its operation in 1972, when the Conservancy was formed. The Conservancy operates the Airport in the Sky as a public airport. It is a favorite destination for pilots, who land and take off from the airport about 14,000 times annually.

### **About the Airport Runway Repair Project**

The airport's main landing strip has required frequent patching, costing the Conservancy about \$250,000 a year in labor and materials. The California Department of Transportation's (Caltrans) Aeronautics Division issues a public use permit for the airport and annually inspects the Airport in the Sky's runway. Caltrans had told the Conservancy that it needed a long-term repair plan in place by September 2018 to continue to operate the airport as a public airport.

Following two years of planning, military equipment arrived on Catalina in December 2018. Over 100 Marines and Seabees arrived on Catalina Island and began work in January to perform the training mission, with nearly 200 Marines and Seabees participating throughout the project. They lived in a tent encampment at the Airport in the Sky working almost every day – weather permitting – to repair the runway.

## **About the Catalina Island Conservancy**

Formed in 1972, the Catalina Island Conservancy is one of California's oldest land trusts. Its mission is to be a responsible steward of its lands through a balance of conservation, education and recreation. Through its ongoing efforts, the Conservancy protects the magnificent natural and cultural heritage of Santa Catalina Island, stewarding approximately 42,000 acres of land and more than 60 miles of rugged shoreline. It provides access to the Island's wildlands and 50 miles of biking and nearly 165 miles of hiking opportunities within its road and trail system. The Conservancy conducts educational outreach through two nature centers, its Wrigley Memorial & Botanic Garden and guided experiences in the Island's rugged interior. Twenty miles from the mainland, the Island is a treasure trove of historical and archaeological sites. It also contains numerous rare and endangered animals and plants. The Island is home to 60 species – and counting – that are found only on Catalina. For additional information, please visit [www.catalinaconservancy.org](http://www.catalinaconservancy.org).

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