

# Navigating a new future for the past

ALAN SMALL

**T**HE Royal Aviation Museum of Western Canada will take “straighten up and fly right,” to a whole new level when it reopens early in 2022.

The museum, which was founded in 1974, unveiled a new logo Monday and a new philosophy that will become part of exhibits at its home around the corner from the James Armstrong Richardson International Airport.

“We’ve gone from an aircraft-centred approach to a story-centred approach,” says Terry Slobodian, the museum’s president and chief executive officer. “It’s not like we shut down the other museum and now we’re going to bring back all the planes that we had at the old museum and nothing’s changed other than the building.

“It’s a collection of all the different stories and different perspectives that people have surrounding those aircraft.”

The museum, which closed in 2018 in preparation for its move, will have 14 zones that follow a century of aviation in Western Canada, from civilian-run bush planes that flew during the 1920s to commercial and military aircraft from the Cold War years to rockets, satellites and payloads from the Space Age and the 21st century.

The new logo is an aircraft — neither a bush plane nor a military jet — flying beneath a stylized red maple leaf. It was created by Winnipeg creative agency Relish after 1,600 people were surveyed, and Slobodian says it instils a pride of being Canadian and a pride in its aviation history.

Like many museums across Canada, the Royal Aviation Museum is addressing calls to action from Indigenous people brought forward by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The new museum will highlight Indigenous people who have worked in the aviation industry in the West as well as their reaction to aviation’s early days.

“When (bush pilots) flew up north, what did they think when they saw their first plane? What were their



ARTIST'S RENDERING

The museum will move to a story-centric approach to curating its aircraft when the new building opens in 2022.

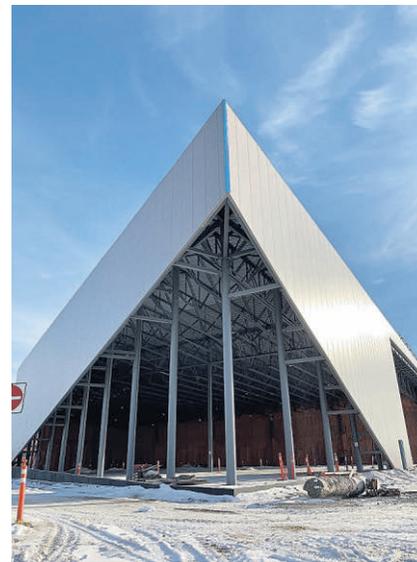


MONIQUE BUCKBERGER PHOTO

The new building overlooks the airport's apron at the south end of the Wellington Avenue loop.

encounters like?” Slobodian says. “Sometimes we might have a series of photographs in our archives for 40 years and not realize the significance of them. But as we’re bringing them out and sharing them with Indigenous people we’re partnering with, we’re learning so much about the other side of the story.”

Staff had found hangars to house the museum’s aircraft around Winnipeg and across Manitoba for the past three years while the planes’ new home was being built. Slobodian says it’ll be a homecoming when they all return to the 86,000 square-foot museum — about the size of a Canadian football field — and join two newly restored aircraft that will add to the exhibits.



Construction is scheduled to be complete June 15, at which point the challenging work of suspending six aircraft will begin. The museum is planning to open in early 2022.

One is a rare CL-84 Dynavert, which Canadair designed in 1974 as a plane for short takeoffs and landings. Only four of the experimental aircraft were built, and two remain — the other being at the Canada Aviation Museum in Ottawa.

The other is a Bellanca air cruiser



The museum's new website design

bush plane, but stories of those who flew and were passengers aboard those aircraft will be just as important as the wings, fuselage and propellers.

“One of the things about bush flying is they would fly in open cockpits and it would be -40 degrees in Manitoba,” Slobodian says. “A friend of mine who is a pilot, she said, ‘You need to feel the cold.’

“They were adventurers, they were pioneers, they were brave, they were courageous.”

Construction is three-quarters finished with an ETA for completion of June 15. The big work, suspending six planes from the ceiling will begin after that, Slobodian says.

“Figuring out how to do it was very difficult,” he says. “The Snowbird plane, the Tutor, is going to be on an amazing angle.”

alan.small@freepress.mb.ca