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Event Contact

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Recognition Ceremony for Edward (Eddie) G. Burnet

The Port of Benton is hosting a recognition ceremony for retired local pilot, Captain Edward (Eddie) G. Burnet, who was the first pilot to land on the newly “public” Richland Airport airfield on December 1, 1961.

To honor the 60-year anniversary of this historic occasion, the Port will be presenting Captain Burnet with Proclamation 21-02, which was signed by Port Commissioners at the November 10, 2021 Commission Meeting. Proclamation 21-02 not only recognizes Captain Burnet as the first pilot to land at the now public Richland Airport, but also for his many accomplishments involving local aviation.

The Port of Benton engaged Captain Burnet and partners in the Richland Flying Service to become the airport’s first fixed based operator, an FAA approved flight and ground school, maintenance facility, air ambulance provider, and pilot examination center.

Captain Burnet got his start flying in 1938 and flew B-24s stateside during WWII for the US Army Air Corp and was part of the team of pilots that flew to Michigan to check the planes over, flying on to other states for further inspection. It was later said that Henry Ford was quoted as saying that WWII was won by producing one B-24 every hour around the clock.

Captain Burnet was also known as the captain of the volunteer Richland Civil Air Patrol Corps in the 1950’s and was well known in the area for his many remarkable aviation-related feats, including landing his plane on an icy US 410, about four miles west of Richland, after observing an accident scene on the roadway below. Captain Burnet loaded an injured man into his airplane and transported him to an awaiting ambulance at the Richland Airport.

Additionally, Captain Burnet successfully averted disaster when his nose gear failed in the Cessna he was piloting. Burnet was able to land the plane safely with just the two rear wheels while the passengers and co-pilot piled upon each other in the back of the plane to put as much weight in the rear of the plane as possible.

A similar incident involving a Cessna 320 also forced Captain Burnet to “crash-land” at the Richland Airport, but once again, Captain Burnet’s quick-thinking and skillful abilities prevented disaster.

The 1975 Richland Airport Master Plan states that operations opened at the Richland Airport when on, December 1, 1961, Eddie Burnet made the first private flight landing at the Richland Airport and relaced the red beacon lens with a green lens, officially opening the airport to the public. The Port of Benton would like to recognize the significance and importance of this act by recognizing Captain Burnet for his contribution to the growth and future of the Richland Airport.

In addition to the reading of Proclamation 21-02, and an official dedication presented by the Port, the City of Richland will also be in attendance to recognize Captain Burnet’s accomplishments. Photos and historical articles will be on display, including photos of the actual plane that was used by Captain Burnet on December 1, 1961, a Key West Blue Piper PA-16 Clipper. The Port has been in contact with the current owner of the Piper and at 72-years old, it’s still as good as new! Ann’s Best Creole & Soul Food, located adjacent to the Richland Airport tower, will be offering a clam chowder special of the day, which is one of Captain Burnet’s favorites.

The ceremony will take place on December 1, 2021 at 11 a.m. at the Richland Airport.

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