

The Vertical Flight Heritage Sites Program

“Morton” facility in Springfield, Pennsylvania

Remarks by Mike Hirschberg, AHS International Executive Director

Thank you AJ. And thank you, Congressman Meehan for coming out today, and for all of your great leadership and support for providing the most capable rotorcraft possible to our men and women in uniform. On behalf of AHS International, Congressman, please allow me to present this small token of appreciation for your service, an official AHS medallion. Also, we are honored to have Mrs. Frank Piasecki with us today. Vivian, I'd also like to ask you to accept an AHS medallion on behalf of the Piasecki family.

Thank you also to Mr. Owens [UAW] and to Mr. Baker [Boeing], for all the men and women who work tirelessly to design, build and deliver these modern marvels of technology. Their efforts save lives and make invaluable contributions to achieving our national objectives.

I'd also like to thank AJ Fiory [Boeing] and John Piasecki [Piasecki Aircraft] for their support of this ceremony today, and the entire team who overcome 100 different obstacles with 101 solutions to get us here today. The dedication of Vicki Meyers at Piasecki, Dan Newman, Ken Bartie and the many, many others at Boeing and Piasecki — in addition to their day jobs — were very heartwarming in making this ceremony fitting for the incredible recognition that this site deserves. And a special thanks to BJs Wholesale Club and to Property Manager Media Real Estate Company for their help and the use of this site for today's ceremony.

And thank you everyone for coming today to help us honor this historic site.

This is hallowed ground. The first American tandem rotor helicopter didn't fly right here. But this is where the tandem quickly matured from being an experimental design to a mainstay of rotary-wing transportation for the US Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and even the Air Force, as well as militaries around the world, and even civilian helicopter airlines and utility operators. Here is where Frank Piasecki's genius and tenacity was matured into an incredible product that has changed the world.

This site, which was then known as Morton, Pennsylvania, was the headquarters for Piasecki Helicopter Corporation, then the Vertol Aircraft Corporation and Boeing Helicopters Vertol Division, before Boeing consolidated its work in Ridley Park in 1971.

70 years ago, a small but rapidly growing Piasecki Helicopter — then at Sharon Hill with 5 flight test vehicles and running out of room to test them — broke ground for a new site, right here. The offices were right here on Woodland Avenue. The aircraft control tower was on the other side of BJ's over there. The Taxi strip was right behind the BJ's Tire Center where the parking lot is today. Right beside where the plaque stands is the concrete slab for the old guard shack, and looking down on us today, is Frank Piasecki's office on the second floor.

On this site, starting when they moved in during March 1947, Piasecki Helicopter developed its tandem rotor helicopters, the XHRPX, becoming the HRP-1 Rescuer, the HUP Retriever and the H-21 Workhorse/Shawnee. As Vertol, the company continued development of the tandem rotor helicopter, resulting in what would become the Boeing CH-46 Sea Knight (or Phrog) and the CH-47 Chinook.

Advanced versions of the Chinook are still development today, and the US Army is planning to continue operating the CH-47 until the year 2060, a century after the Chinook first flew. What an incredible legacy that this site has given to the world.

Now, a little bit about AHS.

AHS International is the technical society for people working on helicopter technology and advancing the state of the art. We were founded by the American helicopter industry as “The American Helicopter Society (AHS)” in February 1943 — which was just before Frank Piasecki’s first helicopter, the PV-2, made its first flight.

The AHS International Vertical Flight Heritage Sites Program is intended to recognize and help preserve sites of the most noteworthy and significant contributions made in both the theory and practice of helicopter and other vertical flight technology.

And this site is undoubtedly well-deserving of this great honor. This is where the tandem rotor helicopter was matured and produced for a quarter century, with nearly 2,000 aircraft passing down the assembly line here.

Now, allow me to read the inscription for the plaque before I perform the official unveiling:

AHS International
Vertical Flight Heritage Site

Piasecki/Vertol/Boeing “Morton” Site
Springfield, Pennsylvania

On this site, Frank Piasecki and the Piasecki Helicopter Corporation developed the world’s first production tandem rotor helicopters in 1947, giving birth to what later became the Boeing Philadelphia site in nearby Ridley Township, as well as Piasecki Aircraft Corporation’s Essington facility.

The tandem rotor helicopter has demonstrated enduring design and utility, with the CH-46 Sea Knight and CH-47 Chinook continuing in service for more than 50 years and improved versions of the Chinook manufactured well into the 21st century.

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And now the moment we've all been waiting for. I hereby declare this an AHS International Vertical flight heritage site.