

The Vertical Flight Heritage Sites Program
“Gardenville”
Cheektowaga, New York
Remarks by Mike Hirschberg, AHS International

Good morning and welcome. I am Mike Hirschberg, the executive director of the American Helicopter Society International. Thank you everyone for coming today to help us honor this historic site – the place where the first Bell helicopter was designed, built and flown.

I want to thank Mary Holtz, supervisor and town historian for the town of Cheektowaga for working with us on this, and especially Greg Weber of Benderson Development for making this all possible; Benderson is the owner of this property and we are happy to have Anna Milone, Benderson’s Regional Director also with us today. I’d also like to recognize Cheektowaga City Councilwoman Diane Benczkowski.

AHS International is the technical society for people working on helicopter technology and advancing the state of the art. We were founded in February 1943 – which was just a few weeks after the first Bell Model 30 first began tethered flight testing right here, on December 29, 1942.

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.

This ceremony was originally planned to take place this past November. But the 5 feet of snow from the storm of the century had other plans.

Here, Bell Aircraft funded a small group to design, build and flight test a helicopter undisturbed by the company’s busy production facilities in Buffalo that were in high gear supporting the War effort. They were led by Arthur Young the inventor, Bart Kelley the trained physicist,

Floyd Carlson the skilled pilot, and just a couple dozen engineers and craftsman. They developed and tested three Bell model 30 helicopters. When done, Bell produced the aircraft as the Bell Model 47 – the world’s first commercial helicopter. Over the next 30 some years, Bell would produce a total of 6,000 Bell 47s, as well as 30,000 other Bell helicopters over the next 7 decades.

Yesterday, we had a ceremony at the Niagara Aerospace Museum to honor this site. Paul Faltyn, the museum director, who is here today, hosted the event. They have several Bell 47s there, including Larry Bell’s personal Model 47. I encourage everyone here to go and see these great historical aircraft. The Model 47 is the iconic M*A*S*H helicopter that saved so many lives during the Korean War.

Again, thank you all for coming to dedicate this site. This is hallowed ground. This is where it all started. The birth of the Bell helicopter.