

THE CARMEL VALLEY VINTAGE AIRFIELD

May 2018 — by Pris Walton

The Carmel Valley Association's mission to protect the beauty, natural resources, and rural character of the Valley comes into sharp focus when one thinks of the Carmel Valley Vintage Airfield—thirty acres of privately-owned, undeveloped land in Carmel Valley Village also known as the Delfino Family Property.

People who have taken a morning jog, walked dogs, or ridden a horse there recognize how integral the airport is to Carmel Valley Village life. CVA believes that it is imperative to preserve and protect this open space and ensure its continued public use by local residents and in emergency situations.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The airport is located right in the heart of Carmel Valley Village. It is the site of the former Carmel Valley Airfield that originated in the 1940s. The airport was closed down in 2002 due to public and private pressure. The pilots and their planes are long gone, and the paving is in disrepair. Now the airport is used by locals and visitors informally as an open space and has served as an important staging facility for fire suppression activities. The current owner (the Delfino Family Trust) has generously allowed local residents to use the 30 acres of flat, open space for exercise and casual recreation.

The potential benefits of saving the airport property for public use are numerous. As well as providing valuable open space for recreation and vital emergency response efforts, it would save the property from development. This in turn would help to serve the environmental protection interests of the broader community.



Byington Ford (with Larry Sweeney, right) dreamed of turning a Carmel Valley oat field into an airpark where pilots could taxi right up to their door.

THE "AIRWAY RANCH" STORY

Byington Ford settled on the Monterey Peninsula in 1941 and bought a corner of the Mexican Rancho Las Laureles. His visionary concept was an airpark where owners could live in close proximity to their airplanes, with homes adjacent to hangars. Unfortunately, the introduction of his dream coincided with the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941.

His "Airway Ranch" only produced two hangar-homes on the property, one burned, and one is still standing but repurposed. In 1949, Peter Delfino bought the property, and the open land has remained integral to emergency and fire safety contingency plans since.

The Carmel Valley Vintage Airpark secured a designation as a State Historic Resource in November of 2003 with a unanimous vote by the California Historical Resources Commission, finding that it represented the first airpark in the United States and the world.



Soberanes Fire Emergency Staging — photo courtesy of Jeff Ohlson, CV Historical Society

CARMEL VALLEY SAVE OPEN SPACE

UPDATE — Joe Hertlein, Board Chair

In June of 2018, a group of concerned residents came together to save the airfield property from development. The community group has become a registered California non-profit corporation and has received federal IRS tax-exempt status. The stated mission is to purchase the 30-acre property to guarantee its future use as open space and for emergency uses such as Cal Fire's wildfire fighting operations. The group has some 400 members so far and is actively soliciting for more supporters and donations. Go to CVSOS.org to learn more and to take a short survey to indicate preferred community uses for the property upon public acquisition.

