Two Millionth Visitor Tours Everett Factory With Boeing CEO

As of today, there are almost as many reasons why Boeing would open its doors to aviation enthusiasts as there are parts on a 777 -- two million in fact.

"A year ago we commemorated our merger with McDonnell Douglas, and today we're celebrating the two millionth visitor to the Boeing Tour Center," said Phil Condit, chairman and chief executive officer of The Boeing Company. He was addressing the tour center's first group of visitors of the day, one of whom was clutching a specially marked two millionth ticket.

Robert Cook, of Sherrard, Ill., was the lucky ticket holder. Cook, who recently retired after 24 years with John Deere, is visiting the Pacific Northwest with his wife, Judy. Cook and his wife accompanied Condit on a personal tour of the Everett factory, including a walk through a 747-400 freighter and a 777-300. At the end of the tour Cook thanked Condit and said, "Until I saw this place, I thought we built big factories at John Deere."

Although Everett factory tours did not officially begin until 1968, customers, suppliers and the general public were as interested in where the Boeing jumbo jet was being built as they were in the airplane itself. Between June 1967 and December 1967, more than 13,000 people "unofficially" toured the factory and flight line. This high interest encouraged Boeing to develop a tour center, which was located in a building near the site of the current tour facility. In 1968 the newly-finished Boeing Tour Center welcomed 39,000 visitors in its first full year of operation.

During the economic downturn of the 1970s, the number of visitors slowed but never stopped. By the early 1980s, 55,000 visitors a year were touring the Everett factory; nearly that many were turned away. It became apparent that the tour center was too small to handle the growing number of visitors, so a new 5,500-square-foot tour center was completed in 1984. Last year, 140,000 people took advantage of the free tour of the home of the Boeing 7-series widebodies -- the 747, 767 and 777. In an interesting historical aside, the original tour center was sold to the town of Gold Bar, located 30 miles east of Everett. The building now serves as Gold Bar's town hall.

Visitors to the Boeing Tour Center come from all over the world: 66 percent from the United States, 13 percent from Europe, 10 percent from the Asia-Pacific region, 9 percent from Canada, 1 percent from Central and South America and about 1 percent from Africa. About 15 percent either work for an airline or an aerospace manufacturer.

Information about the free tour of the Everett factory and flightline is available at www.boeing.com, or by calling 800-464-1476.