Descendants of America's Aviation Pioneers Gather for Celebration of Historic U.S. Achievements

WASHINGTON, June 22, 2012 /PRNewswire/ -- Descendants of America's 'first families of aviation' gathered here Wednesday evening for the first time for a celebration of the monumental achievements of their fathers and grandfathers and the tens of thousands of scientists, engineers, pilots and production workers who helped make America the world's aerospace and technology leader.

The historic reunion at The Newseum included some three dozen members of the Wright, Boeing, Kindelberger, McDonnell and Douglas families who, together with invited guests, previewed a new HD (Hi-Def) production of the EMMY-nominated "Pioneers In Aviation" – a production that features the families' famous forebears which PBS stations across the country will broadcast in the coming months.

"Over the course of six decades, these aeronautical pioneers carried American aviation from the era of winged box-kites to the very frontiers of space, culminating in the Apollo moon landing," said William Winship, writer-director of the "Pioneers" series. "Their achievements transformed the 20th century into what is justifiably termed the American century," he said.

"As an aerospace engineer I am in awe of what they did, and as an American I am so grateful that they did it," added John Tracy, chief technology officer of Boeing, which sponsored the reunion event. "These pioneers did more than give wings to humanity. They defined the purpose of the airplane, harnessed it to defend freedom, and turned it into an instrument of commerce and global connectivity."

Family members attending the reunion and film premiere included:

- Amanda Wright Lane, great grand niece of Wilbur and Orville Wright and trustee of the Wright Family Foundation, which works to preserve the heritage of the men who crystallized the promise of flight when they took to the air at Kitty Hawk
- Gretchen Boeing-Davidson, granddaughter of William Boeing, founder of The Boeing Company (NYSE: BA) who pioneered commercial aviation in the United States with the inauguration of the first national transport system
- James Kindelberger Graham, grandson of James Howard "Dutch" Kindelberger, chairman and CEO of North American Aviation and builder of some of the greatest aircraft of the Second World War
- John McDonnell, son of James Smith McDonnell, founder of McDonnell Aircraft, builder of the greatest fighters of the Cold War era, and a leading figure in America's race to the moon
- James and Malcolm Douglas, sons of Donald Wills Douglas, founder of Douglas Aircraft and the aviation pioneer who bestrode the era of flight as no one before or since.

Academics and military historians have embraced "Pioneers In Aviation" as the definitive history of American aviation on film, and the three-hour, three-part series is shown in high schools, colleges and universities across the United States. The new HD production features newly-recovered historical footage from the archives of Boeing, Douglas, North American and McDonnell, including:

- The Wright brothers' famous 1908 Army flight trials at Fort Myer outside of Washington, D.C.
- The 1942 Doolittle raid featuring Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle
- The North American P-51 Mustang in the skies over Berlin
- A 19-year-old Marilyn Monroe modeling the cabin features of the Douglas DC-6
- Test pilot Tex Johnston's legendary 1955 barrel-roll of a Boeing 707 over Lake Washington
- President Kennedy's 1961 visit to the McDonnell Aircraft plant in St. Louis.

"This is the story that gave birth to the phrase 'American ingenuity'," Winship said.

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