

Former Fairchild factory becomes New Heights Industrial Park

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With airplanes made by Fairchild Aircraft in the background, Michael Langer of The Langer Co. welcomes people to a ribbon-cutting ceremony in a building that once served as part of the Fairchild operation next to Hagerstown Regional Airport. The Langer Co. and The Bluestone Group plan to find reuses for the property.

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With several Fairchild Aircraft airplanes behind him, Michael Langer said the company's old factory could see a bright future.

"This property deserves to be the kind of wonderful economic driver it was in the past," he said during a ceremony Tuesday afternoon at the former Fairchild grounds adjacent to Hagerstown Regional Airport.

The former hangar and factory areas have been rechristened New Heights Industrial Park.

Langer, of The Langer Co., is part of a new ownership group looking to bring new uses to the complex.

Some of those ideas range from an indoor/outdoor recreational center to aircraft-related uses to distribution facilities to museum and convention center space.

About 60 people attended the open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony in what was once a Fairchild hangar. The Hagerstown Aviation Museum brought several of its Fairchild planes to the hangar. Those machines served as the backdrop for the event.

Langer asked people to "use your vision and imagination" to see "what this property can be."

Fairchild once employed thousands, and the company ranked as the largest employer in Washington County. Among other things, Fairchild produced many types of aircraft for the military. Fairchild's A-10 Thunderbolt II, known as the "Warthog," remains in active duty.

But the company shut down its local operations in the 1980s, according to previous Herald-Mail Media reports.

Most of the complex, now marked by a Topflight Airpark sign at 18450 Showalter Road, has been empty for several years.

The complex has been divided into two parcels. One part includes a two-story, 119,166-square-foot office building. Space is for lease in that structure.

The larger parcel includes 41 acres and the former production and hangar facilities of the Fairchild operation. According to online property records, First Flight Unit 2 Limited Partnership of Chantilly, Va., sold that part of the property in June through a deed in lieu of foreclosure to Topflight Owner LLC for \$12,284,636. The mailing address of Topflight Owner LLC is listed in care of The Bluestone Group of New York.

According to its website, Bluestone, a private investment firm, "specializes in taking advantage of value-add scenarios such as under-managed properties, developing markets and distressed assets."

Eli Tabak and Marc Mendelsohn of The Bluestone Group attended Tuesday's event. Tabak said The Bluestone Group and The Langer Co. are partners in New Heights.

In addressing the crowd, Langer and Tabak praised the work of local business and economic development leaders, including representatives of the Washington County Department of Business Development.

"It's amazing to come to a place where everybody's on the same page. ... We promise to execute on our plan and not stop," Tabak said.

Some of the other speakers Tuesday were John Seburn, president of the Hagerstown Aviation Museum, and Pam Ebersole, a former Fairchild employee.

Seburn traced a brief history of the company and singled out each airplane on display, from small trainers to large "flying boxcars."

The museum lacks a permanent space to display the airplanes and memorabilia it owns, he said. And museum space is one of the ideas being considered for the New Heights development.

At one side of the event Tuesday, a video display showed images of what museum and convention center space might look like at New Heights.

Ebersole said she was a project manager in the production control department. She said her father, James Kercheval Jr., was director of engineering at Fairchild.

"It was a really fun job. It was a fast-moving job," she said.

Ebersole has been a volunteer for the museum. Through that work, she said, she's learned that Fairchild airplanes have fans far and wide. She's hoping the New Heights facility will have space for the historic Fairchild planes that were made there.

"People all over the world love Fairchild planes," she said.

