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# Aviation Heritage Park to display space shuttle scale model

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Col. Terry Wilcutt, a NASA Space Shuttle Commander born in Russellville and a Western Kentucky University graduate, speaks at the grand opening celebration for the Aviation Heritage Park Museum on Sept. 23.

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The Bowling Green Aviation Heritage Park will launch an out of this world exhibit this Memorial Day, as a 1:15 scale model of the Space Shuttle Atlantis is set to be introduced.

The eight and a half foot replica, “will be displayed as a tribute to all of those who served on the space shuttle” and tell the story of WKU graduate and Russellville native Terry Wilcutt, according to the parks website.

“We’re putting this exhibit together to tell the story of the space station, and our southcentral Kentucky connection to the space program through him (Wilcutt),” AHP Executive Director Bob Bubnis said.

Wilcutt has traveled 17.1 million miles in his over 1,000 hours in space, Bubnis said, and will take part in the unveiling and pose for photos with visitors.

The shuttle comes as a donation from the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. Bubnis had high praise for Warren County Judge-Executive Doug Gorman for his help in getting the shuttle to the AHP.

“There were four museums who were trying to get it,” Bubnis said. “Judge Gorman really got on it ... . We had to go through the city for us to get this. Because he was faster, and got our request in first, we were able to get this piece.”

However, when the piece first got to the AHP, it was in “terrible shape,” as the estimated cost for the restoration sat around \$5,000. That was until modeler Chris Bowling stepped in.

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Bowling, along with some help, volunteered 611 hours to the project. He placed close to 18,000 tiles and completed the project on April 4 following a year of work.

“An opportunity like this seldom falls into a modeler’s lap,” Bowling said. “I knew they had a limited budget, so this was my way of making a donation to the museum.”

According to Bubnis, the AHP would not have been able to accept the donation without Bowling’s work. Bowling will join Wilcutt at the model’s introduction.

“To know that people are going to enjoy that from all ages, that’s enough payment from me and the crew that made this possible,” Bowling said.

Bowling said he does not “believe there is another model of a shuttle out there like this one,” noting the intricate restoration as what sets the replica apart from others.

“I wanted to give the museum something nobody else is going to have,” Bowling said. “The laying of the tiles on the bottom side of the orbiter – I used different shades of paint to replicate the heat searing of the tiles ... . I just wanted to add a special touch.”

The Model will be on permanent display at the AHP, “honoring not just Terry Wilcutt, but also modelers,” Bubnis said.