

Phantom (Continued from pg. 1)

would have to get through dense red tape to even request such a surplus vehicle.

"With Dave and Beverly's help, we were finally able to make some guiding connections. It was at the 2016 PhanCon in Holloman AFB that we learned how to properly apply for the F-4," Norwood said.

Two months later, the three got together to form the group "Friends of the F-4 Phantom", and on November 15, 2016, formally petitioned the Grove City Council for a letter to be sent to request an F-4.

While the original request was abandoned due to many applicants filed with the National Air Force Museum, it opened the door to more networking opportunities. Soon, an F-4 was discovered destined for GSAXcess that ultimately only had two other applicants. It was in March of 2017 that the Friends of the F-4 Phantom again appeared before the council for a Letter of Intent. The letter was written and approved by the council at the March 21st meeting of the Grove City Council, and the City of Grove was awarded the F-4 on April 5th.

"It was a community effort," Norwood stated. "While it will never be known with certainty, I believe it was all the letters of support from community organizations that swung our application in a winning direction. Between Dr. David Roberts of the Civil Air Patrol, the VFW, the American Legion Auxiliary, Bob Brogdon, Friends of the F-4 Phantom, and the other citizens who sent in letters of support for the project, we as a community showed an ardent desire to have the F-4 here. The support we had is something we cannot thank the community enough for."

However, there remain several limiting factors in getting the aircraft to Grove, including the particular concern of physically transporting the F-4 from Holloman AFB.

"We have been quoted \$75,000 to transport the F-4," said Helms, "and we will need approximately \$25,000 to create and build the memorial. Right now, our goal is to raise \$100,000 through public/private donations and we have a year from April 5th to do it."

The Friends of the F-4 Phantom want to establish a path for the F-4 to be cared for and maintained with the dignity and respect it deserves, and therefore joined with the newly formed "Grow with Grove" Community Foundation as a 501-c3 organization. The group's trio joined with them to accept donations for the exclusive purpose of benefitting the F-4 Phantom.

"We wanted this to live on beyond just us," Beverly Helms said, "We wanted the money for the aircraft to be held by the non-profit 501-c3 Grove Community Foundation. Here,

each donation will be logged by name and amount and a full accounting of the funds. The Friends of the F-4 don't seek refunds for the money we have already paid to start this project; we simply want to get the F-4 to Grove and keep it well-preserved for the community."

The group stated they have garnered a lot of support for the placement of the F-4 and have several large donors lined up to support the project, but they felt it was still too soon to release detailed information at this time as the specifics were not yet confirmed.

"As I said earlier, there is a lot of support in Grove for this project, which is why we think it was awarded to us," said Norwood. "Some of the major supporters of the project are the growing aircraft manufacturers at the Grove Industrial Park. While I am not able to name names at this time, we can say there are a lot of businesses and people in the area who want to see this happen."

With a one year limit on getting the F-4 moved, the group feels the pressure to get the job done as soon as possible. On top of moving the aircraft, one of the other limits placed on the project is the site of the static display. The City of Grove has already committed the labor and materials for the site prep of the display, but the specific location has yet to be determined.

"It must be on City of Grove property," Dave Helms said. "We have several possible sites for the display. We hope with City Manager Bill Keefer, who has been a real help in keeping this project on track, that we will secure a final site soon. The \$100,000 price to disassemble, transport, and reassemble the F-4 is valid as long as we place it onto its final static display when it arrives in Grove. It already has been restored; therefore, there is no major restoration cost which often plagues such displays."

The original site discussed last November was too far away from wide public access, which created the need to seek out a new site. The display area will have to be large enough to place the aircraft which measures 63 feet in length and a 39 foot wingspan. A memorial display will also be attached to the site to honor those who have served, commemorate the F-4, and those who supported the effort to bring it to Grove. The preliminary design of the donor panel will be in the shape of a blast shield behind the Phantom.

"One of the reasons we wanted the F-4 here is to be a memorial to those who served in and those who continue to serve the military," said Beverly Helms. "Our goal is to make it easily accessible to the public and to be an educational experience for all in the Grove area."