

Ninety Nines return to Warwick Municipal Airport for annual picnic and meeting
World War II WASP female pilot guest speaker



Photos by Roger Gavan Members of the North Jersey chapter of the "Ninety Nines," an International organization of women pilots, pose by a PT 17, a WW II US Army primary pilot trainer, with Warwick Municipal Airport Manager Dave Mac Millan and World War II WASP member Kathleen Hilbrand, 93, (center) who flew this type of aircraft and other Army Air Force planes in 1944.

WARWICK — They were weathered out last year but on Saturday, Sept. 9, it was picture perfect for flying into Warwick Municipal Airport for the annual picnic and meeting of the North New Jersey chapter of the "Ninety-Nines."

Chapter Chair Phyllis Kollan and Rosanne Isom, governor of the Ninety Nines New York and New Jersey Section, for example, each arrived in their own planes. Others, all of whom are licensed pilots but live nearby, left their airplanes at home.

Holding the event at Warwick Airport has become a tradition.

Women Airforce Service Pilots And this year, the members invited a special guest speaker, Kathleen Hilbrand, 93, who served in World War II as a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP).

Hilbrand told the story of how and where she first learned to fly as a teenager before being interviewed by the record-setting aviation pioneer and WASP Director, Jacqueline "Jackie" Cochran.

Hilbrand was one of a limited number of women accepted in the WASP and after completing the same primary, basic, and advanced training courses as male Army Air Corps pilots, she went on to ferry military aircraft, tow targets and perform other non-combat flying missions.

Members of the WASP, however, did not have veteran status until an act of Congress was passed in 1977.

The "Ninety-Nines" has been home to women pilots since the early days of aviation.

Amelia Earhart and 98 other female aviators The world famous pilot, Amelia Earhart, its first president, and 98 other early female aviators established the "Ninety Nines" in 1929.

The organization, named after the number of original charter members, is an international non-profit association of licensed professional and private women pilots.

Full membership requires that the applicant be licensed as a fixed wing, helicopter, balloon or glider pilot. And many of the members of the North New Jersey chapter also have instrument, commercial and other advanced ratings.

The annual picnic in September is the chapter's official kick-off for the year's activities.

The North New Jersey chapter of the "Ninety-Nines" continues to offer scholarships for flight training, which are open to any male or female student pilot with an earnest desire to further aviation achievements.

For information, contact the Ninety Nines at northjersey99s@hotmail.com.

- Roger Gavan