

Aviation Museum volunteer uses engineering background to restore aircraft



Bruno Cavallo in the wing of a F7U. (Courtesy of Wings of Freedom Aviation Museum)



By [For Medianews Group](#)

PUBLISHED: July 15, 2026 at 4:47 AM EDT

Bruno Cavallo was introduced to the wonder of aircraft as a youngster during World War II. As an 8 or 9-year-old, Cavallo, 90, of Doylestown, followed the war-related news, scouring newspapers for photos of airplanes.

From there, he began sketching airplanes. By his early teens, he was building model airplanes.

“That was for me,” said Cavallo, who’s volunteered as a restoration fabricator for the Wings of Freedom Aviation Museum since 2018.





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Bruno Cavallo volunteers as a museum docent. (Courtesy of Wings of Freedom Aviation Museum)

Now, instead of building aircraft he can hold in his hands, Cavallo, a retired aeronautical engineer with the Navy, works with restoration volunteers to reconstruct full-size aircraft to display at the Horsham-based museum.

His goal is to continue volunteering with the restoration team and twice a month as a museum docent, “at least” into his mid-90s.

“I’m still 16 in my mind. I’m overall healthy. I take one medication,” he said. “I have almost all my original parts.”

The same is not always true of the aircraft donated or loaned to the museum. Oftentimes, aircraft arrive in parts, in desperate need of repair, painting, and heavy-duty TLC.

The museum obtained the Sikorsky UH-34J Seabat in pieces, in 1988. In April 2023, a volunteer restoration team began the painstaking process of converting the aircraft to replicate the Marine One helicopter that the late Col. Virgil Olson and his co-pilot, Major General Ronald Nelson, the museum’s chairman emeritus, used to transport President Eisenhower in the 1950s.

For the restoration team’s “woodworking guy,” the Marine One makeover is his proudest accomplishment. Cavallo made the seats in the cabin “from scratch, just from a photograph.”

“It just looks so great,” Cavallo said, noting that Major General Nelson told them “it looked exactly like the one he flew. That was the best compliment we could get.”

A Bronx, N.Y. native, Cavallo attended the Manhattan High School of Aviation Trades as a precursor to his aeronautical engineering studies. Following college, Cavallo, and his wife, Perla, moved to Hatboro.

“It was all two-lane roads, dairy farms and cornfields,” Cavallo said of the area in 1957 when he began his 37-year career at the now-shuttered Naval Air Warfare Center in Warminster.

Cavallo focused on conceptual aircraft design in his work with the Navy.

“I was looking out for the future,” he said. “Where were the technologies being developed which could meet the needs (of the military) in eight to 10 years?”

Two such projects were the U.S. Marine Corps’ V-22 Osprey, which was designed to address the need for a vertical takeoff and landing aircraft with the speed of a fixed-wing plane; and the U.S. Air Force’s Boeing C-17 Globemaster.

Much has changed in the nearly 70 years since Cavallo began his career.

“The nature of the tools change,” he said. “We had much simpler tools to work with back then. Lathes and hand saws are better, and metal working techniques have improved.”

The constant has been the “great work” and “great people.”

A seven-year resident of Pine Run retirement community in Doylestown, Cavallo has a new group of counterparts to work alongside. His talented neighbors handcraft wooden photo frames, birdhouses, and model airplanes in their spare time. And, when Cavallo asks, they also help make rocket heads to be installed on museum aircraft.

“I feel like Tom Sawyer handing the brush off to his friends to paint the fence,” Cavallo said.

Cavallo found his way to the Wings of Freedom Aviation Museum nearly 10 years ago while seeking respite in caring for his wife. Following Perla’s death, Cavallo remained committed to his volunteer role.

“It’s keeping me young,” he said. “I’m staying active and keeping the mind active.”

Volunteering also allows him to use the skills he first learned while attending the aviation trade high school in New York. That, coupled with the camaraderie, keeps him coming back.

“We’re very particular and take time with doing the restorations,” Cavallo said. “We want to get it right. (The aircraft are) going to be on display for a long, long time. You want people to see what things really looked like.”

Get involved

Volunteers are welcome to serve in a variety of roles at the Wings of Freedom Aviation Museum. If interested in getting involved, please email museummanager@wofmuseum.org. Memberships and donations are always welcome as well. Learn more: <https://wingsoffreedommuseum.org/join-us/>.

About Wings of Freedom Aviation Museum

The Wings of Freedom Aviation Museum is operated by the Delaware Valley Historical Aircraft Association, a nonprofit organization focused on preserving the aviation history of the greater Delaware Valley since 1972. The museum, which opened in 2004, houses aircraft spanning various eras in the history of aviation: World War I through World War II, The Korean War, The Vietnam War, The Cold War Era, The Gulf War, The Balkan War, The Iraq War, and the War in Afghanistan. The museum is open Saturdays and Sundays from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Wednesdays-Fridays from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. The museum is available for group day trips, scout troop visits, and birthday parties. Guests may use the pavilion for lunch or birthday celebrations. For admission pricing and other information, please visit <https://wingsoffreedommuseum.org/> or call 215-672-2277.

— *Courtesy of Katalinas Communications*