



Community Development
218-299-5370 | 500 Center Avenue | 4th Floor | Moorhead, MN

December 1, 2021

RE: Airport Name Change Request

Greetings Moorhead Airport Users and Stakeholders,

The Airport received a citizen request to consider renaming Moorhead's airport to: **"Moorhead Municipal Airport – Florence Klingensmith Field – JKJ"**.

Background:

Florence (Gunderson) Klingensmith was born in 1904 in Oakport Township and grew up in Moorhead, MN. She started her aviation career after watching Charles Lindbergh land at Hector Air Field in Fargo, ND in 1927. In 1928, she experienced her first skydive and by 1929 she became the first licensed female pilot in North Dakota. She was famous for her stunts and ambition in air races against men. She was also a charter member of The Ninety-Nines. She passed away flying when her aircraft malfunctioned at the age of 28. Her story is shared in a New York Times best-seller, **Fly Girls** by Keith O'Brien (also see attached).

Comments:

All comments received will be compiled for the Airport Committee and City Council as they consider the name change request.

Please send comments by January 5, 2022 to:

Mail: City of Moorhead
ATTN: Kristie Leshovsky
500 Center Avenue
Moorhead, MN 56561

Email: Art@CityofMoorhead.com

Phone: 218.299.5332

Thank you in advance for any feedback on this request.

Happy Flying!

Enclosures – *Letter of Support – Author of Fly Girls, Keith O'Brian*
Letter of Support – MN 99's

To the members of the City of Moorhead Airport Committee—Mr. Vollmers, Mr. Lougheed, Mr. Lindaas, Mr. Allen, Mr. Phillippi, Mr. Forbes, and Mr. Larson:

I have been fortunate to visit your city on two occasions. In 2017, I came to Moorhead while doing research for my book, *Fly Girls*. Two years later, I returned when libraries across Fargo and Moorhead chose *Fly Girls* to be a community read. Both times, I was there for one reason—and one reason only.

I was there because of Florence Klingensmith.

By now, I understand, you have heard of her. But allow me to explain why Florence is so important to me—and to history, to all of us.

It's not because Florence, a Clay County native, was the first woman to ever receive a pilot's license in North Dakota. It's not because she was the only female aviator based out of Minneapolis in the early 1930s. And it's not even because Florence was one of the few women who knew how to fly a plane at the time. It's because Florence was one of the best at it—and she had fought through much just to sit in a cockpit.

In the United States, in 1928, there were 29 million women eligible to vote in this country. Out of that number—29 million—fewer than a dozen, fewer than 12, had a pilot's license on file at the U.S. Department of Commerce, which was the regulating agency at the time. That June, Florence joined their ranks, with her first solo flight.

But Florence wasn't satisfied to just cruise in the skies over Moorhead and Fargo. She wanted to compete in the air races—one of the most popular sports in America in the 1920s and '30s. And she quickly proved that she had the skill to race anyone, male or female. She was faster than Amelia Earhart. Indeed, it was Florence—not Amelia—who won the first ever Amelia Earhart Trophy Race at the National Air Races in Cleveland in 1932. And it was Florence—not Amelia—who was invited to race against the men in Chicago, one year later in 1933: the first woman to ever compete against the men in the sky.

That day, Florence would fly a plane that had killed many men. The plane, called a Gee Bee, was shaped like a bullet, and was the fastest plane of its time. And its inherent flaws would lead directly to Florence's death, too. The right wing of the speedy plane disintegrated in mid-flight that day in Chicago, killing Florence just as her life had begun. She was 29 years old.

In moments like these in the 1930s, male aviators typically received grand memorials, moments of silence, and national tributes. Florence received nothing of the like. Instead, male aviation officials in Chicago shipped her body home to Moorhead on a train, naked and wrapped in newspapers. Despite all the obvious evidence, they claimed it was Florence's fault that she had crashed. They blamed her because she was a woman—a woman who had dared to fly.

In *Fly Girls*, I had a chance to right that historical wrong—and I consider it one of the great honors of my career. By telling Florence's story, I helped inspire others, like Moorhead resident, Marisa Bengtson-Loerzel. Through Marisa, and many others, Florence lives again.

But you have a chance to do much more than I could ever do. By renaming your airport after Florence Klingensmith, you could reclaim a local hero and remind everyone who flies in and out of your city about a great woman who once lived there and dared to do amazing things.

She was cherished once in Moorhead, and she could be again. It's really up to you.

I'm sorry I can't attend the Airport Committee meeting this week. But I would be happy to answer any questions you might have at a future meeting or via phone or email. Please don't hesitate to reach out. I can be reached at 617-312-7194 and at kob.story@gmail.com.

In the meantime, thanks for your service. Thanks for your hard work, and thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Keith O'Brien
Author of *Fly Girls*
A *New York Times* bestseller

Moorhead Municipal Airport Committee & City Council
c/o Kristie Leshovsky
Moorhead City Hall
500 Center Ave
Moorhead, MN 56561-0779

Dear Members of the Moorhead Airport Committee and Moorhead City Council,

I'm writing you as Minnesota Chapter Chair of The Ninety-Nines Inc., the international women's pilot organization founded by Amelia Earhart in 1929. The Ninety-Nines mission is to promote aviation through education, scholarships and mutual support, while honoring our unique history and sharing our passion for flight. We're proud of our history and mission. Our global membership of female pilots and student pilots is over 6500 strong.

On behalf of the Minnesota Chapter of The Ninety-Nines, I am requesting the Moorhead Municipal Airport Committee and City Council consider and approve renaming the airport to 'Moorhead Municipal Airport-Florence Klingensmith Field'.

As you know, Florence Klingensmith was a remarkable aviation pioneer during the golden age of air racing. She also was a charter member of The Ninety-Nines. Born in Oakport Township, MN, her family moved to Moorhead in 1918 when she was 14. Her passion and love for flying was ignited when she saw Charles Lindbergh touch down at Hector Airfield-Fargo in August 1927. That day, at age 23, she decided to become a pilot. That summer she agreed to do skydiving work in exchange for flying lessons.

During winter 1928 Florence went door to door asking local Fargo businesses to help her purchase a plane which she would use to advertise their businesses at fairs, flying meets and air races. She successfully raised \$3000 (about \$50,000 today) and purchased her first plane, a Monocoupe. In summer 1929, she barnstormed county fairs and completed her first air race. In June 1929 she became the first woman to earn a pilot's license in North Dakota.

Florence set significant aviation records which are astonishing considering the limited capabilities of early aircraft. In April 1930 she set the women's world record for flying inside loops at 143 but sadly no member of the National Aeronautics Association was there to witness it. So, on June 22, 1931, at Wold-Chamberlain Field in Minneapolis, with over 50,000 spectators watching, Florence set the new world record completing 1,078 inside loops in an intense 4.5 hour flight.

At the 1931 Cleveland Air Races, she won 4 woman-only events, earning \$4200 in prize money. At the 1932 National Air Races, she was awarded the Amelia Earhart trophy, the most coveted aviation prize of the time, presented by Amelia Earhart herself.

In 1933, Florence was the first and only woman to enter the prestigious \$10,000 Frank Phillips Trophy Air Race in Chicago. She flew a 'Bee Gee Model Y Senior Sportster' owned by a Michigan man. Florence replaced the original Lycoming 220 hp engine with a 680 hp Wright Whirlwind. Tragically, the aircraft's fabric began to rip off during the race. On that fateful day, September 4, 1933, one day after her 29th birthday, Florence's powerful plane crashed and she died instantly.

Although her life was cut short, Florence's dedication and dogged determination to pursue her passion and dream of flying inspires us still today. She exemplified a pioneering and entrepreneurial spirit in pursuit of her aviation goals. She possessed a compelling 'can-do' attitude which never wavered. Florence demonstrated amazing courage in aviation's early days, when women were often dissuaded and discouraged from entering the new and challenging field. She loved to fly and paved the way to help open the skies to other women interested in flying.

Her story is important. Her life and accomplishments are worthy of honor and special recognition. Her life story speaks to us now, to pursue and live out our dreams whether they are in flying or another arena. It

would be a most fitting tribute to recognize Florence's life and aviation achievements by renaming her hometown airport.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this special request to rename the airport - Moorhead Municipal Airport-Florence Klingensmith Field.



Sincerely,

Cheryl Daml

Cheryl Daml
MN 99s Chapter Chair

cdaml@msn.com

Robyn Stoller

Robyn Stoller
MN 99s Past Vice Chair

rcstoller@icloud.com

A mural honoring Moorhead native and aviation pioneer, Florence Klingensmith is on display in downtown Moorhead at 20 6th St S (Moorhead Ace Hardware). This mural was created by artist team, Cory Gillerstein and Jared Froeber.



Florence Klingensmith is buried at Oak Mound Cemetery, just north of Moorhead, MN in Oakport Township, Clay County, Minnesota.

