

Hull's Aviation Reputation Reaches NASA's Elite

Aviation has a storied history in Sugar Land dating back to at least 1953 when Dr. John "Doc" Hull and his wife, Virginia, founded Hull Field.

Hull started a dental program for 17 prisons that comprised the Texas Department of Corrections' Southern Region, but his passion for aviation laid the groundwork for a legacy that continues to fuel the regional economy. He was a licensed pilot, an instructor and restored vintage aircraft.

Following the closure of his home bases at South Houston Airport and Sam Houston Airport in the early 1950s, Hull was determined to build an airport that would never close. He found and purchased the perfect spot in **landlocked property adjacent to the TDC's Central Prison Unit near Sugar Land**. With an easement granted by the prison system, he built the first runway with a borrowed motor grader and founded Hull Field in 1953.

The airport included a flight school, air taxi service, aircraft rentals, sales, maintenance, painting and overhaul. Hull ran the airport and its businesses while maintaining his dental practice, serving TDC and attaining the rank of colonel in the U.S. Army Reserves. A typical day for Hull would have him performing surgery in the morning, painting an aircraft and giving flight instruction in the afternoon and performing more dentistry in the evening at one of the prisons.

Hull built one of the largest flight schools in Texas, operating it until the 1970s when it was purchased by renowned aviator Maybelle Fletcher and her husband. The Fletcher family ran the school for another 25 years, making

ng it the oldest flight school in Texas.

Restoration of military aircraft gained Hull recognition throughout the region. It was common to see a number of World War I and II aircraft at the field, including P51 Mustangs, a British Spitfire, Bell Cobras and many Stearman biplanes. His expertise caught the attention of many astronauts, who helped Hull find parts for his planes in exchange for flight time in the vintage planes.

Astronauts were frequent visitors at Hull Field, including Deke Slayton, one of NASA's original Mercury 7 astronauts, who participated in one of the aviation races held as part of the airport's annual air show. According to Hull's son, Slayton lost a propeller in the race but skillfully landed his aircraft, an impressive dead-stick landing that was never documented for posterity. Among the aviators he raced against that day was former astronaut Robert Lee "Hoot" Gibson, who flew five Space Shuttle missions.

After years of improvements intended to attract the corporate aviation market, the city of Sugar Land purchased the airport in 1990. Following in the steps of Hull, Sugar Land continued investing in the airport to capitalize on the corporate market.

A state-of-the-art air traffic control tower was officially dedicated in 2001. As part of the festivities, former astronaut Gene Cernan, the last man to walk on the moon, was the first man to officially land at Sugar Land Regional Airport with the assistance of FAA controllers in the new tower. It was one small step for Sugar Land, one giant leap for the regional economy.

The airport contributes greatly to the local economy by providing jobs, corporate access to local markets, access to air transportation services, and facilities to house corporate aviation departments. More than 100 Fortune 500 companies utilize the airport annually. Sugar Land Regional Airport was rated the nation's best airport operator by Aviation International News, improving from fifth best in the nation last year.

Money Magazine and CNNmoney.com rank Sugar Land as one of America's Best Places to Live.
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