

Omaha World Herald-6 May 08

Week of events to precede Offutt show

BY TIM ELFRINK

After a two-year air show hiatus caused by rain and runway repairs, Offutt Air Force Base will offer more than just one weekend of aerial spectacle this summer.

Omaha is one of three cities - the others are Philadelphia and Los Angeles - chosen by the Air Force to host a full week of free public events before its weekend air show.

Those events will include concerts, flyovers and a half marathon, officials announced Monday.

Air Force on display

Information on the Air Force Week is available at airforceweek.com; details on Offutt's air show are available at offuttairshow.com

"Air Force Week in the Heartland" will kick off Aug. 9 with an Omaha ceremony featuring the Air Force Academy's jump team and conclude with Offutt's open house and air show Aug. 16 and 17, headlined by the Air Force Thunderbirds, an F-16 performance flying team.

The weeklong celebration will bring thousands of visitors to Bellevue and Omaha and will help showcase Offutt's mission, said Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman.

"This will put a spotlight on the great work being done by all the military personnel stationed at Offutt," Heineman said at a press conference Monday evening inside an Offutt hangar. "This is likely to be a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see the immense resources of our U.S. Air Force."

Air Force officials are finalizing the schedule, but more than a dozen events are already on the calendar for the week.

The Heartland of America Band will perform at Bellevue University on Aug. 11, and the Tops in Blue - an Air Force musical group - plans an Aug. 14 show at the Civic Auditorium.

Air Force members will visit schools throughout the week, and Air Force displays will be on view at the Henry Doorly Zoo.

"We want to showcase our airmen who are defending this nation every day," said Gen. John Corley, commander of the Air Combat Command, which commands Offutt's 55th Wing. "You'll be proud of your airmen, just as we're proud of the support we get from your communities."

Sixteen performers have been booked for Offutt's air show, which was largely rained out last year. In 2006, the show was forced to relocate to Lincoln while Offutt's runways were repaved.

Coming at the tail end of a summer that will feature such high-profile events as the Olympic swimming trials and the College World Series, Air Force Week will shine another national spotlight on the Omaha metro area, said Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey.

"It's the culmination of all the great things that have happened in Omaha in 2008," Fahey said. "To have thousands of people down here at Offutt to experience firsthand what the men and women of our Air Force do for us every day, it's fantastic."