

## A woman of firsts

### Village of Amelia resident Betty Skelton-Erde inducted into First Flight Society's Paul E. Garber Shrine

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By Jessica Greene

Awards and records are nothing new for Village of Amelia resident Betty Skelton-Erde.

After all, her name already is etched in the National Aviation Hall of Fame; she was the first International Feminine Acrobatic Champion in 1448; she holds two World Light Airplane Altitude records; and she was named the Fastest Woman Driver on Earth in 1965 after topping 315 mph in a jet car. And that's to mention just a few.

But receiving a new accolade never gets old.

"It's always quite a thrill to me," she said.

On Friday, Skelton-Erde was inducted into the First Flight Society's Paul E. Garber Shrine at the Wright Brothers National Memorial in Kill Devil Hills, N.C.

"It's very exciting," Skelton-Erde said of the recognition.

Paul E. Garber was the first director of the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, and the First Flight Society's shrine at the park serves to honor those who have achieved significant "firsts" in aviation, according to the First Flight Society's website.

Skelton-Erde's induction will put her among the ranks of such aviation pioneers as Wilbur and Orville Wright, Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earheart and Neil Armstrong.

"Betty just stands out. She did things that women just didn't do," said Phyllis Miller, executive assistant to the First Flight Society's board of directors.

The shrine is located inside the visitor center of the Wright Brothers National Memorial.

It's a circular room filled with portraits of almost all the 81 previous inductees.

Skelton-Erde said she was "quite surprised" when her portrait was unveiled during the First Flight Society's two days of annual ceremonies held in Kitty Hawk, N.C.

This year's event marked the 107<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wright Brothers first powered flight, and in honor of Skelton-Erde's induction, centered around celebrating women in aviation, Miller said.

In her portrait, Skelton-Erde is flying her famed Pitts Special "Little Stinker" with her pet Chihuahua, Little Tinker.





spokeswoman for Chevrolet and went on to become the first woman to narrate during General Motors' major auto shows.

"There was just no question that the shrine had to have her (as inducted into the shrine)," Miller said.

"I forgot that when I sent (the First in Flight Society) a picture that it had the dog in it. He used to go everywhere with me," she said of the pet. "When I taxied out, he used to sit in my lap, and then he would climb up and sit on my shoulder," she added.

The artwork will hang in the lobby of the visitor center for one year before being placed among the others, Miller said.

Skelton-Erde was selected from a pool of about 10 nominees, but her accolades don't end with aviation trailblazing.

She is often referred to as the "first lady of firsts."

In addition to a long list of aviation accolades, she garnered Hall of Fame status setting land-speed records, became the