

## **Bessie Coleman joins prestigious list Of Aviators featured at TPA**

### **For immediate release**

**Tampa, Fla. (September 7, 2000)** - - Joining aviation legends Neil Armstrong, the Wright Brothers, Chuck Yeager and Amelia Earhart , whose names act as wayfinding icons at Tampa International Airport providing assistance to millions of travelers annually, is the first African-American aviator, Bessie Coleman.

On September 7, 2000, at 10:00 a.m., Level 3, near the Earhart elevators, the Hillsborough County Aviation Authority (HCAA) will officially dedicate the renaming of the Airport Service Road to Bessie Coleman Boulevard. On August 10, 2000, the Aviation Authority board received a request from the National Black Coalition of Federal Aviation Employees (NBCFAE) to name a street on the Airport in honor of Bessie Coleman.

"The Aviation Authority is proud to be the first airport in Florida to acknowledge Bessie Coleman's contributions to aviation. Renaming the Tampa International Airport Service Road to Bessie Coleman Boulevard is a great way to honor her and the national organization of NBCFAE," explained Louis E. Miller, Executive Director, HCAA.

It was determined that the Airport service road beginning at the post office, continuing around the Airport's six airside, the Marriott Hotel and finishing at Airside F's guard shack is now officially called the Bessie Coleman Blvd.

Bessie Coleman was born on January 26, 1892, Atlanta, Texas. The twelfth of thirteen children of an African-American mother and a Cherokee Indian father. Coleman grew up in Waxahachie, Texas, sharecropping cotton fields with her family. Although Coleman did not attend school regularly, she was a good student, loved books and had an aptitude for mathematics. Coleman's mother, Susan Coleman, could not read or write but encouraged her children to learn. To earn money for college, Coleman washed laundry. In 1910, Coleman had earned enough money to attend the Colored Agricultural and Normal University in Langston, Oklahoma. Although Coleman could only afford to stay in college one year, it opened her eyes to life in big cities, and after college she moved to Chicago to be near two of her brothers.

On September 3rd, 1922, Coleman performed in her first American Air Show at Glenn Curtiss Field, Long Island, NY and was an immediate success. Newspapers reported her daring performance of "heart thrilling stunts". On the Southside of Chicago, Coleman was a celebrity, often called "Queen Bess, daredevil aviatrix". Coleman became a popular lecturer and flier at air shows, but she refused to appear in any air show that did not allow Blacks to attend.

Coleman's next goal was to establish a flying school for Blacks and she saved

the money she earned from air shows to establish a school. On April 30th, 1926, in Jacksonville, Florida, while warming up for an air show, Coleman plunged 500 feet to her death.

"Brave Bessie", as the press labeled her after her death, never saw her final dream come true. Coleman inspired both her race and America with her courage and perseverance in overcoming racial prejudice and gender discrimination. She paved the way for other African-Americans and women in aviation which places her among the great American Heroes.

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