

# Sentimental *journey*

Habitat restoration slated for old  
Plant 2 site

By Mike Lombardi

It was once one of the most vital buildings in the United States, a birthplace for America's airpower from World War II to the Cold War.

The plant was so important to the war effort in the 1940s that the 35-acre (14-hectare) roof, under which some 30,000 people built more than 300 bombers a month, was camouflaged to look from above like a residential area of South Seattle, with life-size homes, sidewalks, streets and fake trees—just in case enemy planes paid a visit. They never did.

Known as "Plant 2," the building complex at Boeing Field served as the final assembly site not only for bombers but also for Boeing propliners and prototype airplanes.

The B-17 Flying Fortress was born there, as was the B-52 Stratofortress. So was the 737 commercial jetliner.

However, the end is coming to Plant 2. The timeworn and empty buildings will be demolished this year in conjunction with a Boeing environmental initiative to clean up the site and create habitat restoration projects that will benefit fish and wildlife along the nearby Duwamish Waterway. (See story, Page 13.)

The Plant 2 story began in 1936 after Boeing received its first production contract for the B-17. At the time, the company did not have adequate facilities to build the big bombers and began a search for a suitable location to construct a new factory.

In an effort to keep Boeing in Seattle, a local truck farmer, Giuseppe Desimone, offered the company several acres of his land near Boeing Field for the price of one dollar.

The support from Desimone and the local community was acknowledged by then-Boeing Chairman Claire Egtvedt, who said: "The Boeing Company wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the many public-spirited citizens and various community organizations who have cooperated with the Chamber of Commerce in making it possible for us to acquire this site in Seattle where, just 20 years ago, our company had its start as a one-room shop and grown to its present status."

On May 15, 1936, the Austin Co. began construction of the \$250,000 plant and by November production of Y1B-17s moved to the site. The finished building was not much larger than a U.S. football field. But it was big enough to hold nine B-17s.

During 1937 the factory started assembly of the Model 307 Stratoliners and in July Boeing received an order for 26 B-17s. To



PHOTO: The first production B-52 rolls out of Plant 2 in March 1954. BOEING ARCHIVES



## Planes to salmon

For Plant 2, where so many famous Boeing planes were built, a new chapter is beginning, one that will focus on salmon and aquatic wildlife.

The aging buildings, which have not been used for airplane production in more than 40 years, will be demolished as Boeing moves forward with a habitat restoration project on the banks of the adjacent Duwamish Waterway. The project will create nearly 5 acres (2 hectares) of intertidal wetlands and riparian habitat, restore more than half a mile (nearly a kilometer) of shoreline, and establish a resting area for migratory fish.

"This is the largest continuous habitat improvement planned for the Duwamish," said Steve Shestag, director of Enterprise Remediation. "By restoring the shoreline and creating intertidal wetlands, we will be establishing an important ecological resource to improve Puget Sound fish runs."

The habitat project is part of a federal court settlement between Boeing and several parties, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Interior Department, the Washington State Department of Ecology, and the Suquamish and Muckleshoot Indian tribes. Building demolition will begin later this year, and cleanup and restoration is scheduled to start in the fall of 2012 once final court and agency approvals and permits are obtained.

More than 100,000 cubic yards (83,600 cubic meters) of contaminated sediment will be excavated from the waterway. Boeing will replace the sediment with clean sand and will rebuild the storm drain system at Plant 2 to meet current federal and state standards.

More is planned for the Duwamish Waterway. Boeing, the city of Seattle, the Port of Seattle, King County and other parties are working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, federal and state regulatory agencies, and the community on future environmental cleanup and restoration activities that are anticipated for the Duwamish Superfund site.

— Blythe Jameson

make room for these giant plane programs the factory was doubled in size. A second expansion, started in May 1940, added more than 600,000 square feet (56,000 square meters) to support Boeing's production of 380 Douglas DB-7s for France and Great Britain.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941, the new "Fortress Factory" had finished its final expansion to 1,776,000 square feet (165,000 square meters), with part of the facility built on pilings above the Duwamish Waterway.

To hide the factory from possible aerial attack, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built a massive camouflage covering that made Plant 2 and Boeing Field appear as a residential area. Underneath the camouflage Boeing employees, including women working then-nontraditional factory jobs and known as Rosie the Riveters, worked in two shifts and on multiple moving assembly lines, building an average of 12 B-17s each day. In all, Boeing workers built 6,981 B-17s at Plant 2.

As the war in Europe was coming to an end, B-17 production was halted and Plant 2 became a branch plant that fed

finished B-29 Superfortress assemblies to the Boeing plant in nearby Renton.

After the war, Boeing re-entered the commercial airplane market with the Model 377 Stratocruiser, a commercial version of the C-97. Between 1947 and 1950, Boeing built 56 of the giant double-decked propliners at Plant 2. Along with the 377, two other new airplanes rolled out of the factory—the B-50, a modified version the B-29, and a revolutionary new plane that was the basis for all large subsonic jets to follow. It was called the XB-47 Stratojet.

On Nov. 29, 1951, under cover of darkness and canvas sheets, the secret XB-52 was rolled out of Plant 2—and into the Cold War. The B-52 was the last production line at Plant 2 and Boeing built 278 of the bombers there before the line was permanently moved to Wichita, Kan., in 1958.

The last airplane program at Plant 2 was the 737. In 1967, the first three 737s were built at Plant 2 before final assembly was moved to the Thompson site, also on Boeing Field.

In the more than 40 years since, Plant 2 has been used for

non-airplane manufacturing programs, research work and storage. The huge factory is now mostly empty. Where there was once the deafening sound of rivet guns, there is only silence—and the haunting sense that if one were to visit the old factory in the late hours of the night, it would not be surprising to hear the faraway sound of Doris Day singing "Sentimental Journey" and see the ghostly images of Boeing workers going about their tasks of building the giant bombers that defended freedom worldwide. ■

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**PHOTOS: (Clockwise, from above)** The No. 1 737 is assembled at Plant 2 in July 1966; B-17 final assembly at Plant 2; Boeing employee Elinore Offenbacher poses on the camouflaged roof of Plant 2 for a publicity photo in September 1944; taken in June 1945, this aerial view shows the effectiveness of the camouflage that covered Plant 2. **BOEING ARCHIVES**

