

Gulf Coast Reporters' League

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The SLS core stage is shown installed at the top left of the B-2 test stand at Stennis Space Center. NASA/Stennis photo

Space

Green Run gets a green light

The test of the Space Launch System core stage, where all four RS-25 engines and systems will be fired to simulate a launch is scheduled to take place in November.

Stennis Space Center, Miss.

The final test of NASA's Space Launch System rocket is set to happen at Stennis Space Center in early November, the first time the vehicle, its engines and its electrical and mechanical systems will be put together to operate as one unit.

The SLS is the world's most powerful and tallest rocket and the tallest ever built by NASA. It will kick off a new series of exploration beyond earth's orbit, that will culminate in a 2024 mission that will once again send astronauts to the moon 55 years after the original lunar landing.

"I am excited to see the flight systems come to life that will control the rocket as it sends the first Artemis mission to the moon," said Lisa Espy, the core stage avionics lead at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

It is fitting that the SLS is being put through its paces at Stennis, because the facility was built to test the Saturn rocket stages that sent Americans to the moon in the late 60s and early 70s.

The hot fire test, which is set to last for about eight minutes, is the last hurdle before the rocket can power the Artemis I mission. The mission is currently set to launch in November 2021 and will be one of the first steps in the process of getting men and women on the moon.

NASA started the Green Run test in January, when it installed the 212 foot core stage in a test stand at Stennis. The test gets its name because it involves making sure new or “green” hardware works.

There are eight separate tests that make up the battery of Green Run tests, which include such tasks as making sure the main propulsion system components work, simulating a launch countdown and checking out the hydraulic systems.

The hot fire test will replicate the launch by loading in the liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen propellants and allowing them to flow throughout the system as the four RS-25 engines are fired. This will demonstrate all parts of the rocket can work together, just as they must do for a successful launch.

“It is the ultimate proof that the vehicle works as advertised,” said Maury Vander, chief of test operations at Stennis.

The Green Run test has seen some delays. Stennis was closed from March to late May because of the coronavirus pandemic, with only personnel handling essential safety and security functions allowed inside.

When workers were allowed back after more than two months, they

had to reactivate systems and check out the test stand and test control center, while following guidelines set by the Centers for Disease Control to reduce the spread of the pandemic.

The final test was then set to happen October 24, but Vander said there was a slight delay because of the threats Hurricanes Marco and Laura posed to the Gulf Coast in late August. While Marco fizzled out, Laura did heavy damage to a swath of Louisiana.

The core stage is the backbone of the rocket, containing the fuel and all of the systems needed to feed the four engines, along with flight computers and avionics needed to make the flight happen. It was built at NASA’s Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans with contributions from suppliers across the country. The advanced manufacturing facility at Michoud has been used by NASA for decades to build components, such as Saturn launch vehicles and the external fuel tanks on the space shuttle. Boeing is the lead contractor for the core stage, with the RS-25 engines built by Aerojet Rocketdyne, and the test is being conducted by engineers from Stennis, Marshall and SLS contractors. Vander said hundreds of people are involved in staging the test.

If everything goes well with the test in early November, Vander said the SLS core stage will remain at Stennis for a few more weeks, then preparations will begin to transport it to Kennedy Space Center in Florida. “If it all goes according to plan, this should occur late this year/early next year,” he said. Once at Kennedy, the core stage will be assembled with the other parts of the SLS rocket and the Orion spacecraft.

The SLS is the only rocket that can send the Orion craft, astronauts and cargo to the moon in a single mission. By reducing the number of trips to the moon, the risk of the journey is reduced. Eventually, the SLS will be capable of sending a payload of more than 45 metric tons to the moon, or just under 100,000 pounds.

The SLS Program was formed in the fall of 2011, said Tracy McMahan, a Marshall spokeswoman. The rocket completed its critical design review in 2015, where the design was set and work started on building the hardware that will fly. Most parts of the rocket are new, McMahan said, but 16 engines came from the Space Shuttle program. Those engines had to be upgraded to fly on SLS and they were tested at Stennis.

The first flight of the SLS will be powering the Artemis I mission, set to launch in November 2021. It will be an unmanned mission, in which the Orion spacecraft will travel 280,000 miles from Earth, well past the moon. Orion will fly miles above the moon, then use the gravitational force of the body to propel it in a new orbit about 40,000 miles away. The craft will spend six days collecting data, pass the moon again, and use the gravity to propel it on a quick trip back to earth. Orion will make a splash landing in the Pacific Ocean, off the coast of Baja California. Artemis II will be a similar mission, set to launch in 2023, but astronauts will be onboard.

- Timothy Boone

Economic development

Luth's task: building community wealth

It's important not only to bring new dollars into a community with businesses big and small, but to ensure the mix helps diversify the local economy.

Pensacola, Fla.

It's one thing to ensure businesses are strong. Quite another to bring in new ones, large and small, infuse new money and diversify the economy.

That's the task Scott Luth has.

As a young man, Luth was always interested in business, but it was his future father-in-law who sparked his interest in community and economic development.

Now the CEO of FloridaWest Economic Development Alliance, Luth has for the past six years used that spark to fire up the Pensacola area economy, leading efforts to attract and recruit new industry and commercial development, retain and expand existing businesses, support entrepreneurship, develop the workforce, and much more.

Luth's journey into the business world may have begun as a child growing up in Westerville, Ohio, a suburb just outside Columbus, a city that serves as sort of a bellwether for new and expanding businesses.

"We were sort of one of the first places where chain restaurants and new technology were launched," Luth said. The Columbus metro area was the first to have such innovations as talking vending machines and bowling alleys with digital screens, Luth said, adding that test marketers felt "if folks in that area



Scott Luth's interest in business led him to economic development.

FloridaWest photo

would like it, so would the rest of the United States."

After graduating from high school in Westerville, Luth attended The College of Wooster, a small private school for which he played football. Within the first year, however, Luth's parents had moved to Florida, and Luth decided he liked Tampa's winter climate a lot more than Ohio's blizzards. He resumed his college studies at Hillsborough Community College.

When his younger brother won a chance to play football as a walk-on for Mississippi State University, Luth followed him there to pursue a bachelor's degree in business management.

It was there that Luth met his future wife, Michelle McGilberry,

whose father, Dr. Joe McGilberry, headed up the university's Food and Fiber Center and later its Extension Service.

"He worked with a lot of small businesses, agricultural businesses, and that was my introduction to working in economic development on behalf of communities," Luth said.

Luth graduated in 1991 and spent the next decade or so in the following community and economic development organizations in Mississippi:

- Southwest MS Planning and Development District, Natchez
- The Alliance, Corinth
- Panola Partnership, Inc., Batesville

- Cleveland-Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce, Cleveland

In 2005, he was tapped to serve as executive vice president of Glasgow-Barren County Industrial Development Economic Authority, Glasgow, Ky. Two years later, he was back in Mississippi, this time as business development manager for Entergy Mississippi, Inc. in Jackson.

From there, Luth was recruited by the president of the Greater Pensacola Chamber of Commerce to serve as its senior vice president of economic development.

At that time, the chamber was an umbrella organization for three areas: Tourism, community development/quality-of-life, and economic development. That's a huge undertaking for a single organization such as the chamber.

Tourism, of course, is a primary economic driver in the region, as it is in most Florida coastal communities. Community development efforts focus on workforce development, education, beautification, retail development, and "making a community a place where people want to come," Luth said. While the existing businesses such as stores, coffee shops and insurance agencies are critical to the life of the community, the dollars they generate mostly recirculate, Luth explained.

Six years ago, FloridaWest was born, spinning off from the chamber so it could devote itself exclusively to economic development and bringing new dollars into the community.

"Economic development is where you work to grow your business sector or bring in new businesses," Luth said. "We work with business-

es whose products and services are sold outside the region. Our job is to increase the wealth of the community."

And while economic developers certainly pursue the big projects, they also help develop smaller ones.

"It's not so much the size of the company," Luth said. "It's what they do. Even a one-person company – we work with them as long as they have plans to sell outside the region or globally."

It's important not only to bring new dollars coming into the area, but also to diversify its economic base.

First Covid-19 and most recently Hurricane Sally delivered double whammies to the tourism and travel industries. "The hospitality and tourism industries are continuing to struggle and look for ways to come back," Luth said. But other aspects of Pensacola's economy have remained strong, he added.

To strengthen the economy even further, FloridaWest is pursuing a detailed five-year strategic plan with the overarching commitment to "have direct involvement in new projects (business locations, expansions, or incubation graduations) that result in an average of 400 documented new jobs per year, for a total number of 2,000 documented new jobs by 2023, all with wages above the state average wage (\$44,790 in 2017)."

FloridaWest has targeted its business development efforts on:

- Manufacturing – Advanced, aviation, chemical processing, marine services, and MRO (maintenance, repair and overhaul of aircraft)
- Cybersecurity and information technology – Corporate locations, cybersecurity, financial

and back-office services, and research and development

Aviation and cybersecurity, in particular, are industries that are ingrained in Northwest Florida's military presence, what with NAS Pensacola, long known as the "Cradle of Naval Aviation," and Eglin Air Force Base, which, among other missions, "serves as the focal point for the Combat Air Forces in electronic warfare, armament and avionics, chemical defense, reconnaissance and aircrew training devices," according to the base website.

"Both of those [industries] have a long history here in Pensacola with the military, since the early 1900s for aviation and the 1960s for cybersecurity," Luth said, adding that cybersecurity was known "back in the day" as cryptology.

The spark that lit a fire under Luth's economic development career may, if he has his way, even help launch a regional industry in space exploration. When Space X splashed down in the Gulf waters near Pensacola in early August, astronaut Doug Hurley revisited the town where he originally trained for his aviation career. Pensacola recently applied to become headquarters host of the U.S. Space Command, under which the new Space Force, Air Force and other military branches will operate in space.

"It's not only aerospace, it's space," Luth said of the area's assets and experience. "We've trained half-a-dozen astronauts. Pensacola has a long and rich history of supporting the space industry."

- *Martha Simmons*

Airports

Downtown airport in transformation

A \$160 million Downtown Airport terminal is part of a master plan to bring commercial air service closer to where the population lives and works.

Mobile, Ala.

In 1938, the U.S. Army Air Corps bought the Bates Field municipal airport and established the Brookley Army Air Field, according to a history of Mobile's airports found on the website www.mobairport.com.

Bates Field relocated to west Mobile and is known today as the Mobile Regional Airport. Brookley went on to become the city's largest employer and played an important role in World War II. In 1948, it was renamed Brookley Air Force Base. The base closed in 1969.

More than a half-century after the base closure, and 82 years after the original move out west, the Mobile Airport Authority plans to bring commercial passenger service back to downtown. It's a move that acknowledges the regional airport's status as the red-headed stepchild of the northern Gulf Coast.

The regional airport is spacious, bright and easy to negotiate – once one gets there. That's the problem.

The location is not just out Airport Boulevard. It is *way* out Airport Boulevard, a maddening collection of stoplights, commercial developments and congested traffic that runs seven miles from the airport exit on Interstate 65. If one lives in Baldwin County or in downtown or Midtown Mobile, it's far easier to head east on Interstate



The current Downtown Airport Terminal will continue to be used while a new one is built. *MAA photo*

10 and stay there until the exit for Pensacola International appears.

Whether or not Mobile Regional ever fully deserved the reputation, over the decades it has become known not only as less accessible, but also more expensive and without as many flights to popular destinations as are available at the airports in Pensacola, Gulfport and New Orleans. Advertising campaigns emphasizing flying local and including the price of gasoline and parking when comparing airports have met with mixed success.

Chris Curry, president of the Mobile Airport Authority, said a feasibility study begun in 2018 justified the decision to go back downtown.

"I think it was feasible to do it years ago, but I think no one ever wanted to deal with the amount of difficulty involved in it," Curry said. "After the feasibility study we real-

ized it was a no-brainer, that the downtown airport provided a better overall transportation experience based on its geographic location.

"What may be new is the fact that Baldwin County has grown so quickly. You can also say that would apply to Saraland as well. I think that the downtown airport brings commercial service closer to more users of the system with better access."

Bill Sisson, president and CEO of the Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce and director of the Airport Authority from 2008 to 2013, concurs that the explosion of growth in Baldwin County put the Regional Airport in an out-of-the-way location.

"The center of the metropolitan population has shifted and has shifted more to the east," Sisson said. "It makes more and more

sense for [commercial service] to be at the downtown airport because we're blessed with two airports in this region, which is not typical for an area this size."

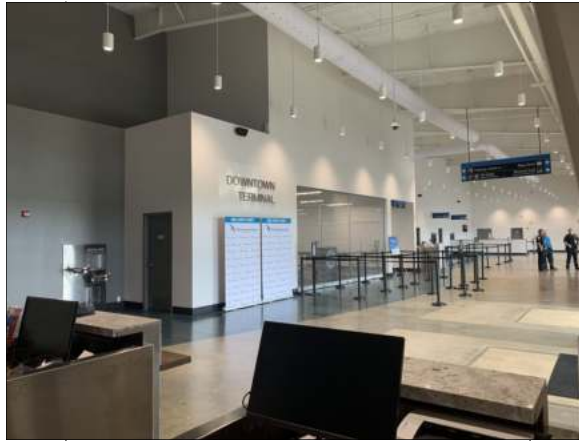
Using a temporary \$8 million terminal, commercial passenger service briefly started up downtown last year with Frontier Airlines, but Frontier pulled out in April of this year largely because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Curry said. At that point, passenger service had dropped 90 percent. Since then, regularly scheduled passenger service has rebounded somewhat but is still down 50 percent over last year.

However, the temporary terminal still accommodates occasional charter flights headed to Nevada and other Western locales for gambling. It also provides flexibility to the project timetable.

The project cost is \$400 million over 20 years. It includes a new \$160 million terminal with as many as eight gates, 12 airline check-in positions, and a parking deck. The new terminal will be at a different location from the current terminal. The relocation of air service is expected to be complete in three to five years. But if a carrier wants to move in sooner, the airport authority is happy to accommodate.

"Any new carrier that's interested in serving Mobile, we would bring them to the downtown terminal," Curry said. "If one of the legacy carriers from the regional airport wanted to come downtown quicker than we could build a new terminal, we would consider bringing them to the temporary terminal."

The Federal Aviation Administration provides the bulk of the money



The temporary terminal has no scheduled flights. *MAA photo*

for airport improvements, 70 to 90 percent depending on whether a particular piece of the project, such as parking or concessions, will generate its own revenue. The FAA already has approved the 20-year master plan released by the Airport Authority in August, Curry said.

Roughly 5 percent of the money would come from state government. The rest would be a combination of airport funds and possibly private investors or partnerships as well as city and county governments. Curry said the authority has the bonding capacity to cover its contribution or speed up the timetable if the need arises.

Although Curry would not discuss whether a purchase is imminent or the potential price tags, the Airport Authority is also eyeing additional land downtown.

"We have expressed interest in two pieces of land. One is to the east and is currently owned by the USA Foundation, and there is an area to the north that is currently owned by the Mobile Housing Board. Both of these properties at one time were part of the Brookley Air Force Base," he said.

The Downtown Airport comprises 1,200 acres, and surrounding industrial park, which includes the

Airbus manufacturing campus, makes up another 500. The Regional Airport is much larger, taking up 1,700 acres out of a total of 3,000 available.

The plan is that the Regional Airport will stay open, even without passenger service, Curry said. The Coast Guard operates out of Mobile Regional, and some military training is also done there.

"We would probably reduce the footprint by selling some of the land and investing it in the downtown airport," he said.

Even if COVID-19 continues to depress passenger traffic, the Downtown Airport's accessibility provides greater economic development options, according to Sisson.

"My position from an economic development standpoint has always been we either had to bring the airport to the infrastructure or bring the infrastructure to the airport," he said. "You could have the airport out where it is but you need better access to it."

Curry sees the Downtown Airport as part of a transportation synergy. Interstate 10 offers highway access, the Port of Mobile offers water and rail service is also available. There has even been talk of ferry service from the Eastern Shore of Baldwin County.

"The move downtown is more than just an air service upgrade," Curry said. "It is transforming the Downtown Airport into a major multimodal transportation hub."

- Jane Nicholes

Book review

“Flight 7” is a whodunit with heart

There’s a song that, even today, will make Ken Fortenberry sad. But that’s understandable. It reminds him of one of the most traumatic days in his life.

I can’t begin to imagine what it would be like to be told at the tender age of six

that daddy is never coming home again. But Ken knows because he lived through it.

And it was only recently that I



David Tortorano

found out about that tragic loss he suffered so long ago.

Ken Fortenberry is the author of “*Flight 7 Is Missing: The Search For My Father’s Killer*.” It’s a whodunit about the mysterious disappearance 63 years ago of a passenger plane over the Pacific Ocean. I was curious, not only because I once worked for him, but because the subject was aviation, the focus of this newsletter. I felt it was a must-read for me, so I bought a copy of his 350-page book published by Fayetteville Mafia Press.

Because I know the author, I decided it would be a good idea to probe just a little bit deeper to provide some additional insight for my aviation-savvy readers. So I gave him a call for an interview.

I first met Ken in the early ’90s when he was managing editor at the *Pensacola News Journal* and I became the paper’s military reporter. Ken had hired me after UPI closed its Pensacola bureau, and since I didn’t want to move away, I took the job

he offered. We got along well enough, but you don’t become buddies in a boss-worker situation. In fact, we laughed during the call because I admitted there were many times I muttered a word that ends in “hole.”

He wasn’t surprised, and it’s not that uncommon in those days. Hard-headed reporters, equally hard-headed editors were bound to lock horns from time to time.

But Ken did seem to take particular interest when any of the stories I wrote involved aircraft from the nearby Navy and Air Force bases.

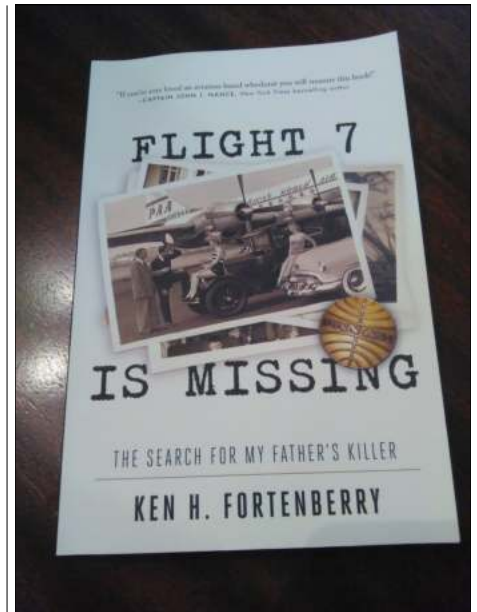
Now I understand why.

The book is about Ken’s decades-long on-and-off investigation to find out what happened to that airliner. He was just 14 when he decided to find out what happened, but as he got older and launched his own career, he ended up using the tools of a journalist to try to come up with answers.

Ken’s father, William Holland Fortenberry, was a 35-year-old Pan American co-pilot of a four-engine Boeing Stratocruiser. He was one of eight crew members and 36 passengers who boarded *Romance of the Skies* in San Francisco Nov. 8, 1957 for a 10-hour flight to Honolulu.

But at the midway point high above the Pacific, the pilot checked in with a ship in the area, and nothing strange was reported. But shortly later something catastrophic happened aboard the flight.

Ken brings us to that fateful day, hours before the disaster, when he recalls driving back home with his siblings and mother after bringing



his father to the airport. During the 40-minute drive home, they discussed the upcoming Thanksgiving, and the turkey and pumpkin pie daddy loved so much. His mother turned on the radio to a Palo Alto station, and a song about a lonely heart, *You Belong to Me*, was playing:

*Fly the ocean
In a silver plane
Watch the jungle
When it's wet with rain...*

It was only well after that ride home that Ken found out that his daddy wasn’t coming home again. And that song to this day still makes him chokes up.

“It takes me back in time. It makes me think of my mother particularly. That was one of her favorite songs. He was gone so much. That song spoke to her. It tears me up even now,” he said.

What is particularly effective in

the telling of his investigation is that he uses such story-telling devices, including letters from his father, to bring the reader back in time and to make the search personal.

It's effective, and keeps the reader turning the pages. One recollection really struck me. I told Ken during our phone call that the passage about his father's memorial service made me think of my grandfather's service. I told him that when I was three or four, I remember my father's hands on my shoulders during the service that I couldn't quite comprehend. I remember looking at dad, and saw the tears in his eyes.

Yes, I told Ken. I was lucky I had my father nearby. Then I read him a passage from his book about the memorial service for his daddy.

"Mom is unusually strong today, and for the first time in weeks I see no tears rolling down her face," he wrote. Then he put this about that sad day: "No casket. No grave. No dirt. No tearful farewells as we walk away from the final resting place high on a western hill. Daddy's casket is the crumpled cockpit of a Boeing Stratocruiser. His watery grave is at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, and his final resting place is thousands of miles away from us, a place we will never see, a grave we will never visit."

He said hearing me read the passage made him feel that loneliness once again.

"You know you can't lose somebody you love like that so early in your life and not leave a hole that can't ever be filled," he said.

"There's not a day in my life even now that I don't think about my dad."

It took Ken many years of research, contacting anyone and eve-

ryone, public and private, that might provide some answers. The book takes the reader through all the leads he followed. And while a few of them seemed outlandish, like looking into the possibility that UFOs were involved and going to some psychics, by the end of the book it's clear why he did so in such detail.

"I wanted to make sure that when I finished this book, because I knew there would be critical reviews and naturally expected that, but I wanted people to say this guy left no stone unturned," he said.

In doing so, Ken showed just what it is to be a journalist. He went down every possible avenue, no matter how seemingly unfruitful any particular road might be. Several times I wondered why he was going down a road I immediately discounted. Then it hit me. I would have done the same. A real reporter doesn't discount something out of hand. Scrutinize the theory, show why it couldn't be correct and move on to the next.

It's what a good journalist does. But unlike a newspaper story, which doesn't tell you all the avenues that were pursued and discounted, Ken puts it all there in the book so you can judge for yourself. Sure, it slows the pace a bit, but it's a solid approach to this kind of mystery.

He does come up with what he thinks is the best answer for why his father not only died, but that he and the others were the victims of a killer. I won't give away what he found, but I find myself agreeing with his assessment.

I was curious though, about whether I was one of the few people at the paper who didn't know about this. So I asked Ken if it was

something others knew about.

"I never talked about it, even to my family much," he said, partly because it happened so long ago, and partly because if he failed to find answers, the only one who would be disappointed would be him. "I've heard people say, I had no clue."

So why did he finish this book after all these years? Ken said he felt like he had to keep a promise to himself and his father to do whatever he could to find out what happened. And yes, he does feel some closure. But there is still one thing left to do.

Ken has never taken a flight across the Pacific Ocean. He has never been close to his father's final resting place. But he said that he does plan to do so.

"When I get to that point halfway between San Francisco and Honolulu, I'll want to tell the pilot, 'take me down low to where we think that plane went down.'"

But of course, unless he's in a private plane, that's not going to happen. Still, he knows what he'll do when he gets to the right location.

"I hope to do that in the next couple of years. And that will definitely be the end of it for me, frankly," he said. Closure, finally?

"Absolutely. I'll whisper, 'Goodbye dad,' and I really will be able to say goodbye then."



If you're interested in aviation, fascinated by history, or one person's quest to find answers to a decades-old mystery, then this is a book for you. It can be purchased through Amazon, or you can search online.