

ALASKA STATE SENATE

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Senator Mike Cronk

Sponsor Statement for SB 152

“An Act renaming the Ruby Airport as Harold Esmailka Airport; and providing for an effective date.”

One of our most important obligations as a State Legislature is to honor Alaska’s community leaders and extraordinary citizens. SB 152 would recognize the contributions of Harold Esmailka to the community of Ruby and Alaska’s aviation industry by renaming Ruby Airport to Harold Esmailka Airport.

Harold Esmailka, of Ruby, is a pioneer in Alaskan aviation. Over his lengthy career as a pilot, Harold flew across Alaska and has gotten to know people in dozens of Alaskan communities. In 1954, after concluding his service in the U.S. Army, Harold bought his first airplane - a 65-horsepower Aeronca Chief. Ten years later he and his wife, Florence, settled in Ruby and opened the Ruby Trading Company general store, which provided groceries and goods for the community.

In 1970, Mr. Esmailka opened Harold’s Air Service, which grew to service 63 Alaskan villages and had 28 aircraft in its fleet. Harold’s Air Service provided medivac services to Alaska’s Interior and grew so large that he moved its base to Galena to accommodate its commercial needs. In 1982, Harold sold Harold’s Air Service with plans to retire – but his heart called him back to the skies; just four years later he purchased Tanana Air Service and built the company into a small trailblazer for Interior aviation.

Harold based Tanana Air Service out of Fairbanks, where it provided mail, cargo, passenger transportation services to more than 80 communities. While Harold operated Tanana Air Service, he provided free transportation to the brothers, sisters, and clergy in Fairbanks Catholic Diocese as they traveled to local villages.

SB 152 renames the Ruby Airport to the Harold Esmailka Airport, paying homage to an incredible father, husband, veteran, entrepreneur, and Alaskan aviation legend.

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