

Bill proposed to rename Akhiok runway in memory of dead pilots

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If one new bill passes the Alaska Legislature, a rural runway will soon memorialize two pilots killed while flying over Kodiak.

Among the Kodiak bills in the Legislature this year is Senate Bill 31, which will name the Jim Andie and Robin Starrett Memorial Runway in Akhiok. The bill was introduced by Sen. Gary Stevens and has been referred to the senate's transportation committee for debate.

Linda Amodo, the mayor of Akhiok, proposed the renaming and said it would be a fitting tribute to two pilots who served Akhiok and the archipelago's other rural settlements.

"We wanted to show Servant Air and their families as well as their communities that our hearts were with them," she said.

The idea for the runway renaming came last year but wasn't finished in time to be introduced during last year's legislative session. "By the time we figured out what the necessary steps were, the Legislature was over," Amodo said.

Amodo is Servant Air's agent in Akhiok, and she knew both Andie and Starrett from their trips to town. When they flew to Akhiok, she was there to greet them with coffee, and if weather forced them to stay longer, she offered shelter from the rain.

"I got to know them pretty well," she said.

Starrett was killed Jan. 5, 2008 when the nose baggage door of his Piper Navajo popped open shortly after takeoff from Kodiak State Airport. Five passengers also died in the accident, while four others survived the Kodiak's worst air disaster in recent memory.

Andie died in Sept. 2011 after his aircraft struck a tree near Heitman Lake. Two passengers survived that accident with injuries.

Before their deaths, the pair were on the roster of well-known Kodiak pilots who keep the archipelago's remote settlements and lodges connected to town.

Once the runway renaming passes the Legislature, Amodo plans to hold a dedication ceremony this summer in Akhiok.

A gold-lettered sign will be built next to the runway, and Amodo plans to invite friends and family of the two pilots to attend a barbecue on the runway.