

Today

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Airmen: Faced discrimination

From Page 1

Air Force Base for 18 years before retiring.

Hall was born in 1921, moved to Oklahoma City in 1949 and died in 1971. While here, he was in the civil service and also served as a reserve airman.

The memorial is slated for the Tinker Heritage Air Park at the base. After the design is chosen for the memorial, the air park will be renamed the Charles B. Hall Air Park, said Timothy S. Gray, president of the Charles B. Hall Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.

Gray, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, said the contest is a way for the group to reach out to young people and create a memorial to Hall that is new and different.

"They want to make it a living memorial, instead of a dead memorial," Gray said. "Hands-on, so people stop and look.

"We want people to say, 'I read about this or heard about it. Let's go see what this Charles B. Hall memorial is all about.' "

Metro area students were invited to create designs for a memorial in February. Gray said he has spoken to 1,000 students at area schools about the competition, which is still open for students to become a part.

Once the final design is selected in June, the implementation phase will begin in the air

park, located south of Interstate 40 near the Tinker Air Force Base gate at Air Depot.

Gray said the winning design will be chosen by independent judges. That design will be used to create the memorial.

The chapter will also award the best designs in several age categories, he said.

Gray said the chapter will raise money and seek grants and donations to build the memorial.

"Tinker said they would give us the space," he said.

Although Johnson and his friends wouldn't talk about the specifics of their designs before the competition was over, he said the chance to participate was a good opportunity.

"It's really interesting. Any time you have a chance to create a memorial for somebody, you should jump at the chance," he said. "They need to be glorified like anybody else."

Computer graphic design student Tony Romo said he is participating in the competition because the memorial will have meaning — "to make people more aware of who fought and why."

Donna Harding knew some of the facts surrounding the Tuskegee Airmen, but not all of them. She sees the memorial as an opportunity to make people more aware of the men and serve as a history lesson.

"I knew they had participated in World War II. I knew they were an all-black squadron. I knew about the discrimination they faced," the computer graphic design student said.