

## Recreation Complex To Open By September By Roseanne Honan



**Pictured: an artist's rendering of an aerial view of the Aviator Sports and Recreation Complex.**

A new sports and recreation facility currently being constructed in rehabbed hangars at Floyd Bennett Field may be open as soon as September 2006.

The complex will usher in another incarnation of historic Floyd Bennett Field, which once housed the first municipal airport in New York and was utilized as a Naval Air Base during World War II before being decommissioned in 1971. Only a portion of the area is still utilized by the Coast Guard, the NYPD and its Aviation Units, where they are restricted to helicopter flying only.

The multi-million dollar facility will encompass indoor and outdoor activities, including, according to the Aviator website, a 25,000 square foot multi-purpose field house; two NHL regulation-sized ice rinks; catering for parties as large as 1,500 people; and two bi-level 8,000 square foot dining facilities, including a food court and restaurant/ sports bar which promises top-rated food. In total, the indoor area of the complex will be approximately 170,000 square feet; not including the outdoor area, which includes plans for a three quarter-mile track and other fields. And the expansive grounds, which will take up 20 to 25 acres of land, provide plenty of parking spaces, enough to accommodate at least 5,000 cars.

In the spirit of Floyd Bennett Field's historic significance, where pioneering aviators such as Amelia Earhart, Howard Hughes and "Wrong Way" Corrigan took flight, the company was christened Aviator. The corporation was created exclusively for the construction at the Field by various partners experienced in sports venues, including an investment banker who is the former owner of the New York Islanders and Phoenix Coyotes; and a co-founder of Chelsea Piers in Manhattan, among others.

As indicated on the Aviator website, the company is committed to preserving the historical characteristics of Floyd Bennett Field, while introducing a modern approach to sports and recreation. "We are going to adhere to the historical integrity of Floyd Bennett Field, and keep the façade of the hangars intact," said Marcus Minifee, vice president of marketing and corporate partnerships for Aviator.

Aviator Corporation will work with the National Park Services and Gateway during the springtime festivities, which will feature a historic plane exhibition and "candy drop" for children. To honor the aviators of the past, the complex will feature a permanent wall display, commemorating achievements in flight.

With the complex's grand opening not so far off in the future, Congressman Weiner also noted the convenience that the complex will provide for area residents, as well as tourists. An avid hockey player, the Congressman found it an inconvenience to travel to Chelsea Piers for hockey practice. Now with the revitalization of the park, as well as other projects in the works, Rockaway residents will benefit greatly. "There will be a sense of life, a sense of activity," he said. "It (Aviation Sports and Recreation) will become a destination place not just for tourists, but for residents as well," he concluded.

For more information about the Aviator Sports and Recreation Center, visit their website at [www.aviatorsports.com](http://www.aviatorsports.com).



**A picture of Floyd Bennett Field's primary function in the 1930's: a busy airport. What is now the Ryan Visitor Center (left) was once the air traffic control tower of the airfield. One focal point of the new Aviator Sports and Recreation Complex will be a replica of a Lockheed plane at the entrance to the facilities, similar to an aircraft pictured here.**

