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POWERING LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

## Caskey fabulous refurb draws visitors to East Berlin VFW

By Duane Kanagy, *Penn Lines Correspondent*

TONY RIFE, president of The Caskey Group, has involved the York-based communications and printing company in some unusual projects, but none as extraordinary as refurbishing a Grumman F-14B Tomcat jet fighter/bomber during the summer of 2018.

With gallons of paint, an ample supply of elbow grease and painstaking research, the company restored the plane's exterior grandeur. What you can now see atop a small rise outside East Berlin Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 8896 more accurately represents the majestic piece of machinery that was deployed aboard the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman and flew in Operations Desert Storm and Desert Fox.

The Caskey Group is known for wrapping vehicles with vinyl graphic marketing brands. One of their biggest projects involved dressing up 76 Martin's potato chip delivery trucks.



**TEAMWORK:** Caskey Group President Tony Rife, third from left, credits his team of employees for being the driving force behind the success of a Tomcat F-14 jet refurbishment project with the East Berlin VFW Post 8896. The unit included, from left, Zach Emler, Ryan Lieb, Alex Meckley, Jeff Yohn, Kendall Fritz and Jason Martin. U.S. Navy records were used to verify the accuracy of every insignia and squadron marking. It took 15 gallons of paint applied by hand to complete the three-month job.



**KEEPER OF THE CAT:** Gary Kopp, past post commander with VFW Post 8896, likes to show visitors special items about the post's restored F-14 fighter/bomber, including its folding cockpit ladder.

“That project took the most vinyl, but the F-14 project was definitely the most unique,” he says. “I told the team, ‘If we can restore a jet, what can’t we do?’”

“Caskey is proud to have accepted the challenge,” Rife, a member of Adams Electric Cooperative, stated in a company newsletter released soon after the job was completed. “When you have opportunities like this, you can say no, or you can jump in and do something special.”

The jet was involved in many firsts during Desert Fox, including being the first to use the latest targeting, bombing and night vision technologies. After Sept. 11, 2001, the jet flew missions as part of the war on terror.

“I originally wanted to get a Huey helicopter,” says Gary Kopp, past post commander and procurement officer.

As it turned out, the Vietnam and Air Force veteran discovered during a Christmas party conversation that it

would be easier to get an F-14. Kopp is now known as “Keeper of the Cat” due to his efforts to get the plane to East Berlin in 2007 after it was retired in 2005.

The VFW spent two years raising money and making plans to have the F-14 delivered by special truck from Naval Air Station Ocean in Virginia where it last flew. People donated money in honor or in memory of loved ones, and local businesses pitched in with donations or provided products and services at a discount.

The plane is on loan from the National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola, Florida. An M60 tank parked nearby is also on loan from the military.

Only East Berlin and Egypt VFW Post 7293 near Allentown have F-14s on display, according to Kopp, and both are in Pennsylvania.

“Barely a day goes by that someone doesn’t pull in here and look at this plane,” he says proudly. “We even added a few members because of it.” 🌟