

## **Gerald W. Yagen**

### **Virginia Beach, Virginia**



1994 Gerald W. Yagen and his wife attended a dinner-dance at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton, Ontario which housed a large collection of historic airplanes. That moment planted the seed that Yagen grew into one of the country's true aviation hidden jewels, The Military Aviation Museum in Pungo. Housing the world's largest collection of flying historic military airplanes, it is one of the Tidewater area's best kept secrets. Yagen began searching for a World War II era aircraft to acquire, but quickly learned that such airplanes were quite difficult to locate and buy. Eventually, he settled on the wrecked remains of a Curtiss P-40E Warhawk recovered from north of the Arctic Circle in Russia. A deal was quickly struck, and the P-40 was moved to Norfolk to begin restoration. This airplane was the nucleus for what was to become the Military Aviation Museum. Yagen acquired the Pungo Airport in Virginia Beach, Virginia and began collecting historic airplanes and building his museum. Yagen's collection has grown to over 50 airplanes spanning the time from WWI through the end of WWII. The museum's facilities consist of over 100,000 sq. ft. of museum buildings and period hangars depicting WWI and WWII aviation facilities. Today, these rare airplanes have been saved and preserved and are on display and fly from the Virginia Beach airport for future generations to enjoy and marvel.

Beginning at age 23 in 1969, Yagen founded Search and Recruit International, a recruiting business specializing in placing military veterans into technical jobs with defense contractors. Over the years this original business grew into training schools to upgrade the skills of veterans moving into the age of digital electronics in aviation. From this small beginning, the schools have grown into a nationwide network of technical schools known as Aviation Institutes of Maintenance. Headquartered in Virginia Beach, the Aviation Institutes of Maintenance eleven schools train students to become FAA licensed aircraft mechanics and is the largest private training firm of aircraft technicians in the world.