

Ya gotta be there!

To learn more about the Boeing Tour Center in Everett, Wash., visit www.futureofflight.org or www.boeing.com/companyoffices/aboutus/tours. The Boeing Tour Center is offering a discount on ticket prices available to Boeing employees, Boeing retirees, Boeing contractors and their guests from Jan. 3 through April 15. The discounted ticket price of \$7.50 includes admission to the Future of Flight gallery.



Worth a look

Everett factory tour expands, gets enhancements

By Eric Fetters-Walp

The face of Boeing for scores of people in the general public on any given day isn't a company executive. Instead it's Sharon Stevens and her fellow tour guides in Everett, Wash.

For the past 40 years, the Boeing Tour Center has shown millions of visitors Everett's airplane factory and introduced them to Boeing. People come from all corners of the globe, including Antarctica on one occasion, to see jetliners being built in the world's largest building by volume.

"This is the first impression many people get of The Boeing Company, so it's a real responsibility to make sure that the experience is a real positive one for them," Stevens said.

As the tour enters its fifth decade, it's keeping up with the factory's move into the future. An updated introductory movie made its debut a year ago. The tour was expanded from 60 to 90 minutes, allowing time for visitors to see the 747, 777 and 787 Dreamliner lines from two different balconies, according to Roy Henslee, manager of the Boeing Tour Center. Previously, visitors got the chance to see just one of the production line areas. Balcony viewpoints will be outfitted in the coming months with new see-through barriers, making it more convenient and safer for everyone to see the activity below them.

These changes are aimed at providing a "safe, secure and satisfactory" tour for visitors, said David Reese, senior manager of Boeing Everett Visitor Relations. He added that the new barriers will allow the tour to waive its current height requirement, allowing visits by children and more students, the people who will be flying the next generation of Boeing airplanes.

Additionally, updated video presentations on the balconies

soon will introduce visitors to the employees assembling the airplanes. "We want to tell the story of the people who work there, because it's amazing what they do," Henslee said.

Co-located with the Future of Flight Aviation Center since 2005, the Tour Center gives visitors a brief history of the way Boeing changed aviation and international travel with the introduction of the Everett-built 747 and how it's leading the way forward with the 787 Dreamliner. Interest in that new airplane in particular is drawing greater numbers of people to the tour.

Public curiosity about the Everett factory began as soon as the building was completed. In 1967, more than 13,000 people took "unofficial" tours of the factory, spurring Boeing to develop a formal tour. The tour recorded its 3 millionth all-time visitor in 2007, a year in which it attracted more than 175,000 people. That was up more than 30 percent from the prior year.

Handling that many people around a busy workplace takes military-like precision from tour guides and the bus drivers. That's especially true in the summer, when bigger crowds mean the number of tour guides swells from less than a dozen to twice that number, Henslee said.

Stevens said it's hard to tire of the Everett plant, even when she sees it several times a day. "The factory is never routine," she said. "It's a constantly changing environment. It's always interesting." ■

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PHOTO: The tour of the Boeing factory in Everett, Wash., now gives visitors a chance to see production lines for the 747, 777 and 787 Dreamliner airplanes. More upgrades to the overlook balconies are planned in the coming months. GAIL HANUSA/BOEING