

# ST. CROIX SOURCE

## 'Red Tails' Movie Opening Tells Story with Link to St. Croix

BY JOHN BAUR — JANUARY 19, 2012

For Carmen Heywood, Thursday's movie opening is part Hollywood premiere, part history; she has a personal connection to it that makes it all the more exciting. The movie, which opens at the Sunny Isles movie theater Thursday, is "Red Tails," and it tells the story – or one of the stories, as its famous director says – of the Tuskegee Airmen. Two of those groundbreaking aviators – Herbert Hosea Heywood and Henry E. Rohlsen – came to the skies of Europe from the Virgin Islands. Heywood is the daughter of Herbert, and she said this week that she's been looking forward to the movie for almost 10 years.

When World War II started, black Americans were not allowed in flight training because it was believed they wouldn't be able to master the skills needed to become aerial fighters. With the clamor among African Americans who wanted to fight in the sky for their country, and America's need for more pilots, the formation of a new and special squadron resulted.

**Herbert Hosea Heywood**



They were trained at the Tuskegee University flight program. If they left base they risked run-ins with the racist community that surrounded them. On base they were arrested if they tried to attend the white-only officers club. Their instructors were white officers who didn't believe they were capable of learning. When the first group passed its flight training tests, they were made to take it again because the military brass didn't believe they could do so without cheating.

As Joyce Rohlsen, the widow of Henry, said at a ceremony three years ago honoring the group, "They didn't have to prove themselves 100 percent. They had to prove themselves 1,000 percent."

Carmen Heywood is president of V.I. Tuskegee Airmen Inc., part of a nationwide group keeping the memory of the trail blazing flyers alive. At the group's national conventions she's heard of the plans for the movie for years, and has eagerly looked forward to it.

"It's exciting, and it regenerates a lot of the information about the airmen and what they accomplished," she said this week.

It's a big budget movie with a big cast featuring Terrence Howard, Method Man, David Oyelowo, and Cuba Gooding Jr., and an iconic director, George Lucas, which will help bring in audiences, as well as and help the public learn about a group that has never received a lot of attention.

"This is going to give recognition that they didn't have during the war," Heywood said.

Lucas is the creator of the Star Wars series of six movies, the Indiana Jones movies, and American Graffiti, among many others, and it took all his clout to get the movie made.



In recent interviews leading up to the movie release, Lucas talked about how hard it was to get Hollywood interested in the project. He worked off and on for 20 years developing the project, funding a lot of the early pre-production work and script development himself.

He also said the story of the Tuskegee Airmen is too big for one movie. "Red Tails" focuses almost exclusively on their flying over Europe, where they racked up as impressive a combat record as any group of pilots in any nation's air force. But there are plenty more tales to tell, Lucas has said. He hopes audience reaction to "Red Tails" convinces Hollywood to tell those stories.

Carmen Heywood said the movie will help educate the community about its part in and connection to this piece of history. When people drive by the sign at the Henry E. Rohlsen International Airport, they'll realize who the man is.

Heywood said she often takes her niece, 9-year-old Marciella Heywood, to movies on Saturday afternoons, and lets her pick the film they'll watch. As the release date of "Red Tails" nears, she told her niece that, this weekend, auntie is picking the movie. "It's important that she knows this," Heywood said.

**Henry E. Rohlsen**