



Staff Photo by Benjamin Sharp

Members of the Wharton High School Industrial Technology class gather around the VariEze aircraft that they refurbished. Pictured, in no certain order, are Justin Hlavinka, Jacob Frankum, Chris Moctezuma, Carson Green, Pete Luna, Robert Nunez, Chris Compian, Ethan Blanco, Julian Rivera, Chris Taylor, Brandon Williams, Israel Andrews, Irving Gomez, Freeman Barrett and instructor Charles Crowe. Not pictured are Oscar Garza, Chris Lot and Felipe Lopez.

VariEze will rise again – on a pole

By **BENJAMIN C. SHARP**
Journal-Spectator Staff Writer

A year's worth of effort by Wharton High School students will result in a soaring display at the 20th Century Technology Museum.

Students in Charles Crowe's Industrial Technology classes this week completed their restoration of the Rutan VariEze.

An experimental home-built craft constructed around 1980, the airplane had suffered from years of neglect before falling into the hands of Wharton businessman Art Schulze.

Schulze and his wife, Sharon, are the driving force behind the Fulton Street technology museum.

"Things were pretty well beat up," Schulze said of the airplane's initial condition.

Schulze took the plane to Crowe about a year ago. Crowe's students tackled the task in the midst of several other projects, including the restoration of an antique tractor and of an old car.

One primary problem was that pieces were missing off the aircraft. The nose cone, for example, had disappeared.

There were no blueprints to work from, so Crowe's students had to rely on photographs of a similar craft that's on display at a Smithsonian museum.

"We had to make a foam mold to make the nose," Crowe said.

The pieces that were intact were in such bad condition that they had to be virtually re-crafted from scratch. Crowe said the fiberglass body had deteriorated to the point that it was difficult to re-seal it.

All of that was eventually worked out. The next big decision was what color to paint it.

Schulze said everyone agreed upon keeping it as close to the Smithsonian model as possible. So the white exterior was pin-striped in red and blue. Appropriately, those just happen to be the Wharton High School colors, of course.

Participating students said they learned a lot by working on an airplane. Most said they would like to do something similar in the future.

"It was fun," said freshman Israel Andrews.

The airplane is bound for the tech-

nology museum's front lawn. It will be mounted on a pipe-based pedestal, permanently displaying the craft about 10 feet off the ground.

Being just across the street from the police station should help its security.

Schulze said several plaques will be attached to acknowledge the donors, the students and teachers involved in the restoration, those in the community who contributed to the project and to funding sources.

The VariEze will be transported to the museum lawn via flat-bed trailer and lifted onto its base by crane. Exactly when hasn't yet been decided.

**20th Century
Technology Museum**

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