

Naval aviator Driscoll to be honored by Warbirds

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Have you ever wondered what it's like to fly in a modern \$40 million jet fighter during intense combat dogfights with speeds exceeding 700 miles per hour at altitudes below 100 feet in the face of enemy fire? Or how about the life lessons taught through such an experience?

Navy legend Willy "Irish" Driscoll knows all too well, and he's coming to town this weekend to speak about it and receive a prestigious award. The highly-decorated, famous Navy aviator—featured on national media like the History Channel, Wings and Dogfights—is coming to the Estrella Warbirds Museum.

On Saturday, April 26 the Central Coast Council of the Navy League along with the Estrella Warbirds Museum at the Paso Robles Airport will host Driscoll, who'll give a

speech and be presented with the Bug Roach Prayer Award.

"Anybody that's ever been a fighter pilot or anybody that's ever wanted to be a fighter pilot, this is the chance to see living history," said Rob Bryn, chairman for the Navy League Central Coast Council.

Driscoll, who has been involved with Top Gun as an instructor, recently disembarked from a VIP cruise on the USS Ronald Reagan and will share his experiences about how naval aviation has progressed from the time of the Vietnam conflict to today's aviators, organizers said.

Bryn described Driscoll as "probably one of the most famous naval aviators in the world."

"The guy is a legend, period," he said.

Driscoll has given more than 800 presentations throughout his 30-year career. He's gone on 170

combat missions with 3,500 hours of jet fighter pilot time, more than 5,200 jet dogfights and 510 aircraft carrier landings. He was a member of the Navy's first and only team of jet missile ACES with a shoot down of five enemy fighters in combat, according to his Web site, www.willydriscoll.com.

Saturday's event is a chance for the public to meet Driscoll, watch clips of the dogfights and hear stories from his Top Gun teaching days, organizers said.

"I'm very excited about it," Driscoll said. "I think it's a wonderful organization, and we couldn't be happier with the wonderful support we've gotten through the years from the Paso Robles group. "The way that they support our military and our men and women in uniform is greatly appreciated by the men and women in uniform."

Driscoll's awards include a Navy Cross, two Silver



Submitted Photo

Stars, a Purple Heart, ten Air Medals and nomination for the Medal of Honor.

Every year since 1990, the council presents the award — inscribed with a prayer composed by Roach — to an individual who has made a significant contribution to United States national security. Prior recipients include former President George H.W. Bush, retired U.S. Army Gen. Norman H.

Schwarzkopf, former President Gerald Ford, Sen. John McCain and others.

The Navy League of the United States is a non-profit organization dedicated to educating citizens about the importance of sea power to United States national security and supporting the men and women of the sea services and their families, according to its Web site, www.navyleague.org.

The event will be held Saturday, April 26 at the Estrella Warbirds Museum with a no-host drinks and refreshments at 6 p.m. followed by a dinner and program at 7 p.m.

An auction will also raise funds for the Sea Cadet Program and a special update of the Freedom Flight program. Tickets are \$25 each, and reservations required and can be obtained by calling 466-4196 or online at www.ewarbirds.org.