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2003

Opposite page: *Background:* Setting refueling records over Van Nuys, ca. 1930. *Inset:* Metropolitan Airport, ca. 1930, photo from the Security Pacific Collection/Los Angeles Public Library.
This page: Falcon executive jet takes off, 1994.

The World's Busiest General Aviation Airport

The enticement of 1920s aviation wasn't limited to the Los Angeles basin. In the vast reaches of the San Fernando Valley, 80 acres of farmland and trees were cleared and Metropolitan Airport was created in 1928. Hangars rented for \$35 per month. Landing fees were 50 cents.

The following year, three factories, six hangars and a control tower opened, and the airport's popularity as a location for private flying and air races soared. U.S. Army Air Corps Major Carl Spaatz and Captain Ira Eaker (both became World War II heroes) set a flight endurance record of over 150 hours. Legendary young aviators Elinor Smith and Bobbi Trout set a women's endurance record of 42 hours in their bi-plane, Sunbeam. In 1930, Florence "Pancho" Barnes set a women's speed record at 196 miles per hour, joining Amelia Earhart who set a speed record during an air race.

The airport was popular with Hollywood studios and celebrities. In 1929, Cecil B. DeMille, Gene Autry, Wallace Beery and Howard Hughes flew from Metropolitan. During the 1930s, *Lost Horizon*, *Men With Wings* and *Storm Over the Andes* were filmed there.

In 1942, the U.S. government purchased Metropolitan Airport plus an additional 163 acres to construct the Van Nuys Army Air Field. That same year, the Ingrid Bergman-Humphrey Bogart classic, *Casablanca*, was filmed in a hangar.

In 1949, the airport was renamed San Fernando

Valley Airport. The City of Los Angeles purchased the facility from the U.S. War Assets Administration for a fee of \$1, with the condition the Air National Guard base continue to operate. In 1957, the facility was renamed Van Nuys Airport (VNY) and the runway was extended from 6,000 to 8,000 feet with completion of the Sherman Way underpass. Called to action during the Berlin Crisis of 1961, Guard aircrews provided air transport service over more of the Earth's surface than any other unit up to that time.

In 1963, VNY's annual air shows began—a tradition that has endured into the 21st century. Airport growth continued during the late 1960s with construction of hangars and office space for Beechcraft West and Litton Industries. The current air traffic control tower opened in 1968. In 1975, the FlyAway terminal opened to provide nonstop bus service to/from LAX.

By 1999, an economic impact study found VNY contributed over \$1 billion annually to the Southern California economy and supported over 10,000 jobs. In 2000, LAWA initiated a \$15-million residential sound-proofing program for eligible homes adjacent to VNY.

Today, Van Nuys Airport is the busiest general aviation airport in the world. It plays a crucial role in the Southern California economy, the regional approach to meeting passenger demand, and the entire nation's air transportation system.