GEORGETOWN - Interstate 75 was dubbed the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail on Friday afternoon during a dedication attended by state government leaders and others affiliated with the African-American airmen.

It was the second dedication for the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail. A 23-mile stretch in Fayette County was dedicated in August 2007. Fayette County was chosen because the county is home to the state aviation museum and several of the Tuskegee Airmen were from Central Kentucky.

Motorists entering Fayette County will see one of the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail signs on I-75 South near Iron Works Pike.

On April 12, Gov. Steve Beshear signed a bill giving the trail its official name. "We're not going to be just satisfied with I-75 in Kentucky," Spriggs said.

Spriggs said it's important to remember the airmen while many of them are still alive. Most are in their late 80s or 90s. Spriggs also wants those who don't know about the Tuskegee Airmen to become motivated to do more research.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized an "experimental program" to train African-Americans as military pilots at the Tuskegee Institute starting in 1941. The airmen went on to become one of the most decorated American air units of the war, overcoming not only attacks by enemy planes but racial discrimination in the military and at home.

"Tuskegee Airmen history is not black history," Spriggs said. "Tuskegee Airmen history is American history. Beshear noted that it's appropriate that Kentucky has led the way in honoring the airmen. Eleven cadets in the original group of men were from Kentucky, he said. Noel Parrish, a white Army officer from Versailles, was the first commander of the base at Tuskegee, Ala., where the group trained.

State Sen. Kathy Stein and state Rep. Reginald Meeks, two of four legislators who Spriggs said were the "driving force" behind the project, attended Friday's dedication. The other two, Rep. Bob Damron and Sen. Tom Buford, were unable to attend.

Frank Weaver, 84, of Louisville, is considered an original Tuskegee Airmen. He said he was glad that so many steps had been taken to remember the men, but he said that wasn't on their minds years ago. "It was just something that had to be done," Weaver said. "It's an honor to serve the country and make it better for the young folks."

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