

(Updated Wednesday, September 28, 2005, 5:40 AM)

VISALIA - An Orange County businessman who came to the Tulare County Board of Supervisors with a proposal to build lightweight sport aircraft at Sequoia Field has left a trail of unpaid debts and broken promises stretching halfway across the country.

In 2001, John Dearden approached officials in Cape Girardeau, a Missouri town of 37,000, with what seemed to them to be a wonderful proposal: If they helped Dearden's company, Renaissance Aircraft LLC, build a new manufacturing site, Renaissance would employ 200 local residents and become a steady source of tax revenue.

Dearden, according to city attorney Eric Cunningham, talked about the booming light sport aircraft industry and plans to produce hundreds of planes annually.

Today, all that remains of Renaissance Aircraft in Cape Girardeau is a 60,000-square-foot building, constructed in 2003, that holds a few machines and the remains of several partially assembled aircraft. That, Cunningham said, and a monthly bond payment of about \$24,000 the city continues to pay as it hunts for a new tenant.

"When they came here, we were very hopeful that they would make a go of it, that they would produce hundreds of planes and have hundreds of employees," Cunningham said. "It didn't go the way they hoped."

Dearden, reached by phone at his corporate headquarters in Orange, doesn't deny things went wrong in Cape Girardeau.

Tulare County officials said Tuesday they had not heard of Dearden's business problems in Missouri.

Dearden and Cunningham agree legal issues stemming from a lawsuit against Renaissance hampered the Missouri venture and ultimately caused it to fail.

That lawsuit, over the right to produce the Luscombe 8 aircraft, eventually was decided in Renaissance's favor. But by that point it was too late, Dearden said.

"They [Cape Girardeau] evicted us," he said. "We wanted to stay there, build planes and pay off our debt. But they pulled the plug. I think they had another aerospace tenant lined up."

Cunningham said Renaissance was evicted in May for failing to meet its financial obligations. And no other tenant was targeted, he said.

"At this point, our only goal is to find a tenant for the facility," Cunningham said.

Dearden said the current Renaissance Aircraft LLC is a different company.

"That company still exists, and I'm still involved with it. But we've restructured to allow us to get into business without our new investors having to worry about that old debt," Dearden said.

The old debt includes hundreds of thousands of dollars in lease and bond payments never made to Cape Girardeau. Dearden said he hopes proceeds from building planes in Visalia can be used to pay off that debt.

Cunningham said he didn't know the exact amount Renaissance owed to Cape Girardeau, because bond insurance had been used to cover some of Renaissance's defaulted payments. Cunningham also didn't know Dearden was attempting to reorganize his company.

"We had heard they intended to pay off their creditors, including the city of Cape Girardeau, but we had not heard any specifics," Cunningham said.

What Cunningham does know is that the city continues to shoulder the burden for the vacant facility.

"Those payments are being made by the city, something that was never intended, and never budgeted for," Cunningham said.

Tulare County Supervisor Steven Worthley, whose district includes Sequoia Field, said because Dearden had made no official application, the county had no reason to investigate his business.

Dearden's Tulare County proposal caused confusion last week, as county officials denied any promises had been made to allow Renaissance to move into a hangar currently leased by a local firefighting company.

"All Mr. Dearden did was make a public comment on his project during the public comment period," Worthley said. "Anyone can make comments during that time. All we have on the table, officially, for Sequoia Field is funding to redo the runway, lights and fencing. It's way too soon to say any particular company, or individual, might be a tenant there."

Worthley added that any potential tenant for a county-owned facility would be evaluated.

"There are a lot of idea people out there, and there is no lack of wonderful ideas," Worthley said.

"But when it comes time for these people to write checks, the herd really thins out."

The reporter can be reached at [dboyles@fresnobee.com](mailto:dboyles@fresnobee.com) or (559) 622-2411.

## John Ellis

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**From:** "John Ellis" <johnee@idd.net>  
**To:** <cwinell@mindspring.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 08, 2005 9:34 AM  
**Subject:** Attn. John Dearden

Good Day John,

The last time we ran into each other, you told me I had "done the dumbest thing you had ever heard of". The time prior to that you called me "a snake in the grass".

I take exception to both these statements.

John, your comment's offended me. The broken promises you made about payroll being paid when lawsuit settled offended me. Your promise to pay everyone when you get production started, in my opinion is another lie, which offends me.

Read the news article from "FresnoBee" which I include below.

"That company still exists, and I'm still involved with it. But we've restructured to allow us to get into business without our new investors having to worry about that old debt," Dearden said.

Knowing that Renaissance owes an estimated amount to the following former employees: Thomas 65,000, John Ellis 40,000, Mark, Ken, Richard, and Nick about 15,000 each, and no idea of amount owed Pat, Jack, Jimmy, and the others, I guess the total amount to be somewhere around \$ 175,000.

I think I can get everyone to settle for \$125,000 total, a savings of roughly \$50,000.

If you will give the employee group a note with monthly payments, I feel sure all will sign a release for amount owed. The payments would be made to a bank savings account that would be divided by group annually by percentage owed.

An agreement of this nature would stop any action by any of this group to hinder your getting started again.

This would also enable you and me to stop trading insults should we run into each other.

I just want you to know my feelings and thoughts.

Have a nice day.