



**N**ovember 2011 marked the end of a long, distinguished era for pilots of the former Continental Express. Now operating under a single certificate with Atlantic

in Houston, Tex., early that morning. The new company launched its rebranded operation of the merged airlines under the ExpressJet name on Dec. 31, 2011.

While Atlantic Southeast and ExpressJet are now operating under a single certificate, several hurdles still must be cleared before the airlines can truly be merged. Of chief importance is combining the two ALPA pilot groups. The pilots have been actively negotiating for a joint collective bargaining agreement (JCBA), a prerequisite for the integration of the two groups, since May 2011. Their goal: a contract that recognizes the sacrifices, contributions, and value of the collective pilot group. The pilots are focusing on making improvements to pay, work rules, and benefits.

The pace of negotiations began to stagnate early in the process despite Atlantic Southeast's publicly stating its desire to expeditiously reach a fair JCBA with the pilots. Negotiations have picked up in recent months, and to date the parties have reached tentative agreements on 11 of the 33 contract sections and have opened 7 others for discussion. These include the process for furlough and recall, grievances, and other administrative items.

In 2012, the pilots expect to begin negotiating scope, compensation, retirement and insurance, scheduling, and other benefits- and economic-related items. They are optimistic that, if senior management remains engaged in negotiations, members will have a JCBA to ratify by the end of 2012.

With negotiations well under way, the pilots are also working to merge other areas of business and begin

preparations for becoming one group. One such example is pilot assistance. The ExpressJet pilot assistance program, which has served as a model for many other pilot groups, has helped numerous pilots and family members over the years successfully recover from a drug and/or alcohol dependency. Senior management also recognizes the effectiveness of the pilots' recovery program and has committed to collaborating on a company-wide program to augment the airline's drug and alcohol policy.

Staffing is also an issue that the pilots are closely watching. Weather and other operational issues in early 2011 exacerbated already inadequate staffing levels that wreaked havoc on pilots' quality of life. To address the staffing issue, all furloughed pilots were recalled, roughly 250 pilots were upgraded, and approximately 500 pilots were hired. Additionally, agreements were reached with the Atlantic Southeast MEC and management to address staffing challenges facing that side of the operation. Pilots who would otherwise be furloughed from Atlantic Southeast will have the opportunity to join ExpressJet as new-hire pilots. Similar agreements were reached in 2010, allowing then-furloughed ExpressJet pilots to join Atlantic Southeast as new hires.

"We have the unique ability to assist our fellow pilots," notes Belcastro. "These, however, are only stopgap measures. For the company to fully realize the benefits of this merger and capitalize on future prospects, we need to be one pilot group under one contract. Only then will there be no limit to what our company can achieve."

## ExpressJet

### The Legacy Continues

By Lydia Jakub, ALPA Senior Communications Specialist

Southeast, the airline that began as several commuter carriers cobbled together by Continental Airlines in the early 1990s is one step closer to completing its merger with Atlantic Southeast to become the largest independently owned regional airline in the United States.

"ExpressJet pilots have a long his-



From left, Capts. Adam Rennecker, Stace Robeson, and Chris Belcastro at the EAA International Learn to Fly Day in Lorain, Ohio.

tory of providing outstanding service to our partners and passengers," says Capt. Chris Belcastro, the pilots' Master Executive Council (MEC) chairman. "As we work to forge a new path with our fellow Atlantic Southeast pilots, we look forward to the opportunities ahead to build upon this legacy."

Atlantic Southeast management acquired government approval for a single operating certificate and surrendered the ExpressJet certificate to the FAA on November 17. The surviving certificate went into effect on November 18, following ExpressJet's last "Jetlink" flight, which arrived

#### XJT at a Glance

- **Pilots joined ALPA:** 2004
- **Number of pilots:** More than 2,700
- **Operations:** Flies more than 40,000 passengers per day to 130 destinations in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean with approximately 1,300 departures daily
- **Pilot bases:** Chicago, Ill.; Cleveland, Ohio; Houston, Tex.; Newark, N.J.
- **Headquarters:** Atlanta, Ga.
- **Fleet:** 242 EMB-145s