

Air Wisconsin

Exemplary Pilots, Exemplary Volunteers

By Lydia Jakub
ALPA Senior
Communications Specialist

Air Wisconsin pilots have been working for more than three years to secure a new, improved contract. Their Negotiating Committee is at the tip of the spear, working tirelessly for an agreement that recognizes the pilots' contributions to the airline. The process is being overseen by the National Mediation Board, following the company's request for assistance in 2013.

"Through mediation, we hope to get negotiations back on track," says Capt. Richard Swindell, chairman of the pilots' Master Executive Council (MEC). "We have a vested interest in the continued success of our airline and demand more out of our contract, our careers, and our management team."

At Air Wisconsin, an airline where one in eight pilots is a union volunteer, there are 22 standing committees that encompass a broad range of pilot services and issues that the pilots face daily.

The MEC Legislative Affairs Committee advocated on Capitol Hill to level the playing field for the U.S. airline industry. Volunteers were also in crew rooms, encouraging pilots to support ALPA's Political Action Committee (PAC). Along with 100 percent MEC participation, they quadrupled Air Wisconsin pilot participation in the PAC.

The MEC Scheduling Committee worked to separate the new flight-time/duty-time rules into an easy-to-digest format so that pilots could understand them better and remain

in compliance. The committee also added a dedicated reserve resource coordinator to assist reserve pilots with contractual and regulatory issues unique to them.

Linked in many ways to Part 117, the MEC Central Air Safety Committee has been involved in expanding the protocols and procedures of its fatigue-related safety programs. It also tracks and addresses safety issues, and provides continuing support through the ASAP and FOQA Committees.

Having greatly assisted with the recent implementation of AQP, the MEC Testing and Training Committee has been preparing, alongside the MEC Membership Committee, for the anticipated uptick in pilot hiring in 2014 to replace pilots leaving for a career elsewhere.

The Critical Incident Response Program mobilized and worked closely with the MEC and management to support the pilot group after the tragic loss of an Air Wisconsin pilot in 2013.

The MEC Hotel Committee has worked diligently over the last two years to significantly improve hotel standards and filmed a bedbug room inspection video to help keep pilots safe and healthy.

As speculation of continued consolidation within the regional airline industry continues, the MEC Merger Committee is monitoring the industry, maintaining relationships with other pilot groups, and preparing for every possibility.

Also in existence are the MEC committees commonly referred to as the "silent services," as they do the major-ity of their work behind the

scenes to assist pilots with personal as well as professional issues. These include the Aeromedical, Pilot Assistance, Professional Standards, and Veterans Affairs Committees.



MEC and ALPA staff gather at Fort Benjamin Harrison, a former U.S. Army post in Indianapolis, Ind.

Out in front protecting pilots' rights is the MEC Grievance Committee. In 2013, the pilots augmented their existing grievance process with an alternate dispute resolution process, which uses both expedited arbitration and mediation-arbitration. This change has helped to streamline the grievance process and address issues more quickly and efficiently.

The MEC Communications Committee is the cornerstone of solidarity, using a robust multimodal platform to ensure that the Air Wisconsin pilots are informed. In 2013, "high tech" was paired with "high touch" when the MEC Strategic Planning Committee, supported by the MEC Pilot-to-Pilot Committee, met with every active line pilot by visiting recurrent ground schools and hosting unity building events around the system.

"Serving our pilots is our No. 1 priority," concludes Swindell. "We continually seek innovative solutions and are prepared to address any challenge that may be ahead." 🌐

ARW at a Glance

Pilots joined ALPA: 1982 as a result of the Union of Professional Airmen merger with ALPA

Number of pilots: 665

Operations: Nearly 500 departures per day to 26 states and 3 Canadian provinces; with service to 70 cities throughout North America, the airline carries nearly 6 million passengers per year

Headquarters: Appleton, Wisc.

Domiciles: New York, N.Y.; Norfolk, Va.; Philadelphia, Pa.; and Washington, D.C.

Fleet: 71 Canadair 50-seat regional jets (CRJ200s)