

CJA at a Glance

Pilots joined ALPA: 2006

Number of pilots: 134

Operations: Provides subcontracting services to vacation charter airlines

Fleet: 5 B-737-800s and 7 B-737-800s leased during high season

CanJet

Pilots Cautiously Optimistic About the Future

By Tawnya Burket
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One word can sum up the feelings and overall outlook of the CanJet pilots in 2013—cautious. The year began with tense contract negotiations continuing from 2012. And the year ended with the prospect of

future flying in question as CanJet's contract with its main customer is set to expire in May 2014.

For the first four months of 2013, contract negotiations kept the pilots waiting patiently for their negotiators and Master Executive Council (MEC) to come to them with a ratifiable agreement. Almost a year and a half after direct negotiations began, a tentative agreement was reached with management on May 2. The MEC and negotiators planned and began educational road shows

almost immediately. They visited all four pilot bases in Toronto, Ont.; Montreal, Que.; Halifax, N.S.; and Vancouver, B.C., making direct contact with close to 60 percent of the pilot group at these face-to-face meetings. Voting for

the new contract concluded on May 20, with 80 percent of eligible pilots voting. Of those casting ballots, 87 percent voted in favor of the agreement.

"After negotiations wrapped up, we pieced together the road shows and ratification process rather quickly, allowing the entire process to successfully conclude in less than a month," says Capt. Alex Sirros, the pilots' MEC chairman. "The pilots are essentially pleased with the contract as there are improvements in almost all sections with gains for everyone." Once CanJet implemented the new contract, both the pilots and the company have been complying with its terms, with no real disagreements regarding new contract language.

Unfortunately, the success of achieving a new five-year contract with gains all around was short-lived. Transat A.T., Canada's holiday travel leader, announced in May 2013 that when its charter contract with CanJet expires in May 2014, it will not be renewed. Management has been seeking all available opportunities to obtain flying after May but had not announced any definitive plans as this issue goes to press.

"As 2013 came to a close, we had hoped to hear more concrete commitments from management regarding work beyond May 2014. While talks seem promising, work is yet unsecured," Sirros says.

To keep the pilots informed about hot topics like future flying and contract issues, the MEC has been holding very successful pilot

unity building (PUB) events. In March, the MEC held a PUB event in each hub city. "It was an excellent way to connect with the pilots and discuss the hot topic of ongoing negotiations at the time," notes Sirros. The MEC recently hosted three holiday PUB nights in November in Montreal, Toronto, and Halifax. "We are able to talk openly to the pilots during PUB nights in a relaxed atmosphere, which allow them to ask questions and bond with each other and their union representatives," Sirros says.

Another hot topic for CanJet and other Canadian ALPA-represented pilots is foreign pilots operating in Canada. ALPA and ALPA's Canada Board have long advocated for reforming the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) to ensure that Canadian airline pilots benefit from available airline industry jobs. In mid-2013, changes were implemented to the TFWP that should gradually eliminate the need for foreign flight crews. Because of these policy changes and the process now in place, CanJet is moving away from hiring pilots from outside the border and is giving furloughed Canadian pilots the opportunity for employment, even if just seasonal, in their native country.

Although their flying commitments are uncertain beyond May, the CanJet pilots are focused on the future and remain hopeful that blue skies are on the horizon. "We're cautiously optimistic that we'll be flying for many years to come," says Sirros.



PHOTO BY CAPT. DAN BARNHAM (BEARSKIN)

Capt. Alex Sirros, MEC chairman, and Jon Mason, MEC vice chairman, attend the dinner at the Canada Aviation and Space Museum after the Group C Caucus meeting for Canadian ALPA pilot leaders in Ottawa, Ont., on Oct. 2, 2013.