

PSA

Pilots Forge a New Future

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PSA at a Glance

Pilots joined ALPA: 1988

Number of pilots: 530

Operations: PSA is a wholly owned subsidiary of US Airways Group. It operates 327 flights per day as US Airways Express, serving 65 airports in the U.S.

Bases: Charlotte, N.C.; Dayton, Ohio; and Knoxville, Tenn.

Headquarters: Dayton, Ohio

Fleet: 35 CRJ200s and 14 CRJ700s

Industry consolidation has become the “norm” in the U.S. airline industry. For a number of ALPA-represented pilot groups, especially those who fly for regional airlines, this new norm has had a profound effect on their jobs, their contracts, and their airlines. So when the pilots of PSA Airlines—a wholly owned subsidiary of US Airways Group—learned of the potential merger between US Airways and American Airlines, they had already begun preparing for all possible contingencies for their future.

The PSA Master Executive Council (MEC) started off 2013 by meeting to thoroughly review the group’s strategic plan. This evaluation included a review of all the MEC committees, their goals,

and tactics for accomplishing them. The MEC also hosted a series of pilot unity building events in each of their three domiciles to meet with pilots and receive feedback on various issues.

When the US Airways–American Airlines

merger was announced in February, the MEC pledged to take action to ensure that the pilots would be an integral part of the merged company. Section 6 negotia-

tions, which had dragged on for nearly four years, took on a new urgency, and by mid-February, the PSA Negotiating Committee had reached a tentative agreement with management. On March 27, the pilots ratified a new five-year contract with quality-of-life gains, pay increases, and opportunities for PSA pilots to progress to US Airways mainline. “With this agreement, we achieved much-needed improvements for our pilots, while also creating opportunities to help secure a competitive position for PSA well into the future,” says Capt. Jesse Coeling, the pilots’ MEC chairman.

With an April 1 effective date, the pilot group leaders began contract implementation, educating pilots about the new provisions and the dates they would go into effect. Meanwhile, the pilot group was dealt a serious blow when PSA Vice President of Flight Operations Mark Zweidinger passed away unexpectedly. The pilots had an excellent relationship with him, and his passing affected the pilot group deeply. Still, contract enforcement continued. In addition, the MEC, which actively promotes and supports pilots involvement on MEC and ALPA, International committees, formed a Legislative Affairs Committee and launched an ALPA-PAC drive to increase pilot participation.

In July, the Negotiating Committee, along with representatives from PSA and US Airways management, discussed placement of additional large jets at PSA. Talks continued through the summer and early fall, and on

September 27—six months to the day after they ratified their new contract—PSA pilots ratified agreements that guarantee the placement of a minimum of 30 large regional jets on the PSA operating certificate.

“These new agreements between the pilots, PSA, and US Airways provide PSA pilots with guaranteed seniority-based interviews and hiring at US Airways and the new American Airlines for the next 10 years. We also secured greater job security during that period,” Coeling explains. In exchange, the pilots agreed to the gradual phaseout of high-longevity provisions in the current agreement and small changes to benefits.

Acknowledging that the decision was not an easy one for the pilots or for the MEC, Coeling says, “The MEC thoroughly evaluated the current state of the industry—especially the regional sector—as well as economic and hiring forecasts for the near and long terms, taking into consideration the demographics of the pilot group. We also took a hard look at the challenges facing wholly owned airlines like PSA. Ultimately, we concluded that it was in our pilots’ best interests—now, and in the future—to accept the agreement and recommend that PSA pilots vote in favor of it.”

As the pilots forge their new future, they have established an infrastructure that maintains the current MEC leaders for another two years and solidifies their robust network of pilot committees, ensuring that they are well prepared for the year ahead. 



F/O Costas Sivyllis is a member of ALPA's Education Committee.