ENDEAVOR AIR

Engaged on Every Front

By Kimberly Seitz, ALPA Senior Communications Specialist

Last year was a transformative one for Endeavor Air, a wholly owned subsidiary of Delta Air Lines. The airline took delivery of new aircraft as older ones were retired, opened a domicile at LGA, worked to improve pilot compensation and quality of life, and focused on enhancing safety. Additionally, delivery of the airline's 81 CRJ900s is nearly complete. Yet staffing was, and remains, a struggle as Endeavor is unable to replace the more than 500 pilots who resigned in 2014. As a result, the planned retirement of CRJ200s was accelerated.

During the last two months of the year, however, the pilots' Master Executive Council (MEC) approved several letters of agreement (LOAs) aimed at stemming pilot attrition. The LOAs include pilot retention payments of $15,000 per pilot each year for the next two years and extend Endeavor's streamlined selection process (SSP) Delta interviews to first officers. These improvements were the culmination of the MEC's efforts to work with company executives to improve the pilot contract as the airline seeks stability almost two years after its exit from bankruptcy.

"We are focused on the things we can control, and the MEC and its committees are engaged on every front in an effort to make improvements," says Capt. Jonathan Allen, the pilots' MEC chairman. "While we must defend our contract, we must also seek opportunities to enhance the agreement in ways that mutually benefit our pilots and our airline."

Allen reports that the MEC's Grievance Committee received more than 1,700 pilot issue forms in 2014. Most of those resulted in settlements paid to pilots, either through their informal remedy request process or through the grievance process. "That volume of work takes collaborative effort between the company and our Grievance Committee, and I want to commend the work being done on both sides to address pilot complaints," says Allen.

In addition to efforts to defend their contract, the MEC leaders sought to make advances. To that end, the Negotiating Committee worked with the company to negotiate more than a dozen LOAs in 2014, including ones for continuous nighttime operations lines, which remove inefficient backside-of-the-clock trips from normal lines, and FAR 117, which maintains trip efficiency and quality of life under the new rules.

The Hotel Committee also worked with the company and its hotel provider to raise the quality of overnight hotels. More than a dozen of the hotels that the committee identified as most in need of improvement were replaced, and additional positive hotel changes took place in other cities. Similarly, the Communications Committee addressed pilots' needs by focusing on the timeliness and accuracy of information disseminated through e-mail updates as well as newly installed electronic bulletin boards in each crew room.

"None of these improvements could have happened without the support of management. I appreciate our cooperative relationship and management's willingness to do the right thing and things that make sense," Allen explains. Along those lines, the company recently enhanced training and TDY travel for pilots, implemented a nonpunitive fatigue policy, and, when overseas training became necessary, provided meal vouchers, all beyond any contractual obligation to do so. Delta, too, has offered better travel benefits to Endeavor employees, hosted career-development seminars for Endeavor pilots, and negotiated improvements to the SSP.

Moreover, Endeavor pilots have enjoyed a concerted effort by flight ops management to support pilots in their daily lives. The department has been overhauled to facilitate this new relationship, including appointing Capt. Tom Wychor, the pilots' former MEC chairman, as the system chief pilot.

In 2015, the pilots look forward to the airline achieving a steady-state fleet, which will end serial displacements and once again offer upgrade opportunities to first officers; the introduction of new procedures designed to mirror Delta's; continuation of the MEC-sponsored interview prep seminars; commencement of first officer interviews at Delta; and implementation of automated trip trades.

AT A GLANCE

Pilots joined ALPA: 1988 (as Express Airlines I before its name change to Pinnacle in 2002 and Endeavor Air in 2013); purchased Colgan Air in 2007; purchased Mesaba Airlines in 2010
Number of pilots: 1,500
Operations: More than 850 daily flights as Delta Connection to more than 100 cities across the United States and Canada
Pilot domiciles: Detroit, Mich.; Minneapolis, Minn.; and New York's JFK and LGA
Fleet: 80 CRJ900s and 50 CRJ200s

Capt. Tom Wychor, chief pilot, and F/O Nathan Hillard, MEC secretary-treasurer, work together on Endeavor Air's new route from Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport to Valley International Airport in Harlingen, Tex.