

Alaska

New Focus, Perennial Priorities Await Alaska Pilots In 2010

By Jenn Sutton, ALPA Communications Specialist



PHOTO BY CAPT. SEAN CASSIDY (ALASKA)

Seattle-based F/O Ward Kellogg during a preflight.

ALA at a Glance

Pilots Joined ALPA: 1947
Number of Pilots: 1,455, including 106 currently furloughed
Operations: 421 daily departures to 60 destinations in the United States, Canada, and Mexico
Domiciles: Anchorage, Los Angeles, and Seattle
Fleet: 116 B-737-400/-700/-800/-900s

For Alaska Airlines' pilots, the 2010 landscape looks much different from recent years. Last May, after more than 2½ years in negotiations, the pilots overwhelmingly ratified a new contract—one that included double-digit pay increases, a choice of retirement plans, and revamped scheduling rules. For the first time in more than three decades, their contract was negotiated through traditional Section 6 negotiations, rather than under the looming specter of arbitration, or decided by an arbitrator if direct negotiations failed to produce an agreement.

But on a more somber note, January 1 marked the first time in more than 25 years that the pilot group began the New Year with fellow Alaska pilots on furlough. The first of the 106 furloughs occurred Jan. 6, 2009; the most recent occurred on October 2.

And while the hustle and bustle surrounding negotiations has dissipated, the Alaska Master Executive Council pilot volunteers are staying active and are focused on contract implementation and enforcement, safety, and continuing to represent the interests of all Alaska pilots, including those furloughed.

"For obvious reasons, over the past several years we were focused on negotiating a new contract. Now, we're putting a renewed emphasis on contract compliance and on resolving grievances," says Capt. Bill Shivers, the pilots' MEC chairman. "It's important that we protect the provisions we fought so hard to achieve so that we can continue making gains in our next set of negotiations."

The pilots' Grievance Committee already has begun work to resolve as many outstanding grievances as possible through meetings with management. At the same time, the MEC's Contract Compliance Team is beefing up its communications to the pilots. The pilots' new contract also created a Scheduling Management Group (SMG), which is comprised of both ALPA and management representatives. The SMG meets regularly to resolve scheduling problems and disputes as they arise.

While the majority of the new contractual provisions are already implemented, a few items, including real-time pilot-to-pilot trip trading, must be phased in. The new contract also moved the pilots to

the same performance-based pay profit-sharing plan as the rest of the airline's employees and management. The first opportunity for the pilots to receive their share of the performance-based pay will come this year.

"It appears that 2009 was a profitable year for Alaska Airlines," Shivers says. "Based on that, and the formula for our new profit-sharing plan, the pilots should be looking forward to a profit-sharing check greater than anything we've seen in more than 10 years. Our hope is that this year flying will pick up and we will see recalls. Barring that, we will continue to explore any new, workable ideas to bring our furloughed pilots back to the cockpit."

Also new this year will be training changes, per the new collective bargaining agreement, which provides opportunities for distance learning, allowing for part of the pilots' recurrent training to be performed remotely.

"One of the significant challenges we face is ensuring that our training quality is not diminished as a result of less time in the classroom as distance learning is implemented," says Capt. Bryan Burks, the MEC Training Committee chairman. "That's something that our Committee will focus on."

Contract implementation, enforcement, and training are just a few of the more visible areas of emphasis for the coming years. Working more behind the scenes is the MEC's Central Air Safety Committee, which has been focusing on key safety initiatives. "Our pilots are the true leaders in safety here at Alaska," says Capt. Pat Fitzpatrick, the MEC Central Air Safety Committee chairman. "We were frustrated with the pace of Safety Management System (SMS) development here at Alaska, so the Central Air Safety Committee has taken a leadership role in working to implement an ALPA-centric SMS at Alaska Airlines. Because SMS combines data from ASAPs, FOQA, and human factors analysis, it takes those discrete reports and provides a more comprehensive picture of a specific event. From that, we can create a database that allows us to analyze events on an organizational safety level. This analysis should yield safety recommendations that will be shared with the FAA and management." 