

Colgan

Colgan Pilots: Unified in Voice, Vision, and Goals

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Standing, from left, are F/O Louis Zimmermann, Capt. Jeffrey Leiendecker, Capt. Scott Gates, and Capt. Barry Nomann. Seated is F/O Carla Widman, who pulls double duty as the MEC vice-chair and the Membership Committee chair.

CJC at a Glance

Pilots Joined ALPA: 2008

Number of Pilots: 450

Largest Pilot Bases: Houston, Tex.; Newark, N.J.; Washington, D.C. (Dulles)

Headquarters: Memphis, Tenn.

Operations: Colgan Air operates as Continental Connection, United Express, and US Airways Express, offering daily scheduled service to 53 cities in the United States and Canada

Fleet: 34 Saab 340s, 14 Bombardier Dash 8-Q400s

One year after certifying ALPA as their bargaining representative, the pilots of Colgan Air act more like experienced ALPA veterans than like one of the Association's newest—and youngest—pilot groups. In that short time, their pilot group has come through the tragedy of the Colgan Air Flight 3407 crash unified in their voice, their vision for their group, and their goals for enhancing their airline *and* their careers at Colgan.

They attribute their strong solidarity in large part to their membership in ALPA. "From the beginning, our goal has been to build a cooperative partnership with our management that both furthers our airline's goals for growth and profitability and allows pilots to flourish in their careers at Colgan," says Capt. Mark Segaloff, the Master Executive Council chairman. "But without ALPA representation, we had no means to represent the interests of our pilots on an equal footing with management."

Soon after they joined ALPA, the Colgan pilots acted swiftly to remedy that. Segaloff and his fellow MEC officers and local council representatives set to work staffing and training their committees and launched a membership campaign that resulted in 97 percent of Colgan pilots joining ALPA by April 1, 2009. Since then, union representatives have met with management on a regular basis to lobby on behalf of their pilots regarding critical issues affecting them and to implement tangible, beneficial changes.

In the past few months, increased communication and coordination has taken place between the pilots and management. The positive results include two separate letters of agreement—one concerning maintenance cancellation pay, the other regarding the vacation policy—which took effect in January and several new policies on reduced guarantee lines, reserve call-out order, removal for operations experience, and duty day limits that the Scheduling Committee helped Crew Planning develop.

Additionally, the MEC officers presented management with recommendations for improving employee morale based on the overwhelming feedback they received from the pilots.

The Colgan pilots are encouraged that this positive tone is carrying over into

their contract talks. They began negotiating their first contract in September, and after four bargaining sessions with management, are on track to have opening proposals on all 30 or so contract sections presented within the next few months.

A key factor in the MEC Negotiating Committee's approach to bargaining with management is constant communications with the pilots—i.e., providing them with up-to-date information and actively seeking their feedback. The extensive preparations leading up to contract openers included soliciting input from Colgan pilots via an online survey, analyzing a number of other pilot contracts, and moving forward with their plan to build support for negotiations and to inform pilots about the process.

Two-way communications with the pilots is a big part of all the initiatives that the MEC and various committees have undertaken. "The feedback we get from our pilots arms us with the information we need to make headway in our discussions with management both at the table and in our other discussions," says F/O Carla Widman, who pulls double duty as the MEC vice-chair and the Membership Committee chair.

The Colgan ALPA leaders have implemented a robust communications plan that includes the MEC website, weekly e-mail updates, newsletters, systemwide conference calls, informal airport get-togethers, and an active Pilot-to-Pilot® program.

When they joined ALPA, the Colgan pilot leaders understood the benefit of regular communications and building solid relationships with their peers in the airline industry. They credit ALPA representation with enabling their pilots to interface more closely with pilots from other airlines, most importantly, their sister airline, Pinnacle, which is also owned by Pinnacle Airlines Corporation. "While we are two separate pilot groups and have differences, we are committed to finding common ground to tackle the issues that we both face," Segaloff says. "Through ALPA, our two pilot groups have established an open, on-going relationship in which we can work together and with our managements to improve our airlines." Spoken like a true ALPA veteran who has the unified support of his pilot group behind him. 🌐