

Comair

Comair Pilots Stand Strong Against Further Concessions

By Jen Lofquist, ALPA Communications Specialist



Capt. Matt Lamparter, the pilots' MEC chairman, and Comair President John Bendoraitis sign the new ASAP agreement.

The countdown to 2010 may have just ended, but for Comair pilots a new clock has been set. This fall, Comair pilots will deliver their Section 6 notice to management and begin negotiating their new contract. Currently, these pilots are working under a bankruptcy contract negotiated in 2007 under the threat of bankruptcy-court-imposed conditions. They are hopeful this round of contract negotiations will be different.

In December 2009 the MEC selected a Negotiating Committee, which has already begun to work on its opening proposals for fall 2010. The contract amendable date is March 2011. Few expect negotiations to be quickly resolved as management has indicated it will seek further concessions from the pilots.

The Comair pilots, however, see things a bit differently. They have been sacrificing their own quality of life to help save

the company since 2005—\$42.5 million in concessions to be exact—and they are looking to be fully recognized and rewarded for their contributions.

Since Comair's bankruptcy filing in 2005, the company has struggled financially as a result of the economic

downturn and volatile fuel prices. As a result, 337 pilots were involuntarily or voluntarily furloughed as the airline tried to find its niche in the newly expanded Delta family—which now includes more regional airlines than ever.

In early 2009, management started moving more and more pilots to New York as Delta reduced Comair's flying in Cincinnati. This prompted many of the pilots to become commuters—adding long hours to their already tight schedules.

Regarding safety issues, the MEC unremittingly pushed for the reinstatement of the Aviation Safety Action Program (ASAP), which had been discontinued in October 2008 after significant concerns were raised about how it was being administered. As a result of the successful efforts of the Comair


MEC, the Delta MEC, and other ALPA-represented pilot groups in the Delta family, a new industry-leading ASAP program was established and implemented at Comair.

The pilots, however, were hit with more bad news later that summer as their travel benefits were significantly changed by Delta management. Before June 23, Comair pilots were extended the same benefits as those enjoyed by mainline pilots. After the change, they found themselves well below mainline pilots in priority. This news was especially hard to accept as many of the pilots were forced to commute as a result of the downsizing of the Cincinnati domicile. With reduced travel priority, fewer jumpseats were available and many pilots were faced with the difficulty of simply getting to work.

In September, on top of travel struggles, an additional 80 furloughs were announced. Many pilots took voluntary furloughs or early-out options, which helped to mitigate the extent of the future furloughs.

In November, management learned that Delta was allocating additional flying to Comair and more pilots would be needed. In addition to offering to recall more than 40 pilots, the furloughs planned for January 2010 were cancelled. Although this is good news, more than 300 Comair pilot still remain on furlough.

"One of my main goals as MEC chairman," says Capt. Matt Lamparter, "is to bring every pilot on furlough back to active flying—and to keep those pilots in the cockpit now in the air."

Given their past struggles, the pilots are more unified and focused than ever. Constant communications from the MEC, local councils, and various committees have resulted in a motivated and well-informed pilot group that management will find very hard to divide. 

CMR at a Glance

Pilots Joined ALPA: 1983
Number of Pilots: 1,035 active, 315 furloughed
Headquarters: Erlanger, Ky.
Pilot Domiciles: Cincinnati, Ohio, and New York, N.Y. (JFK)
Fleet: 92 CRJ200s, 15 CRJ700s, 13 CRJ900s