Kelowna Flightcraft

Kelowna Pilots Flying High With New Contract

By David Fisher, ALPA Senior Communications Specialist

Capt. Erv Schleith checks in with Flight Ops and with F/O Dave Kitson and S/O Ross Caddell.

The past year was a memorable one for the Kelowna Flightcraft pilots. Despite the gloomy news about a slowing economy and unstable fuel prices, the KFC Master Executive Council worked with management to finalize a collective bargaining agreement that includes wage increases and improvements in quality of life. After 14 months of tenuous contract negotiations, the pilots ratified a 6-year agreement in January 2009, which became effective in November 2009.

The new contract is a complete language rewrite from cover to cover, which leaves little room for interpretation. The agreement includes language that provides better structure for maintaining staffing levels so that additional pilot hiring is required when overtime levels have been reached or are projected to reach certain levels. This quality-of-life improvement allows the Kelowna pilots to have more control over their schedules and reduces involuntary overtime. The contract also provides significant wage increases in the range of 10–12 percent, and an additional 9 percent in longevity increases over 5 years.

Capt. Ian Gold, the newly elected MEC chairman, is proud of the accomplishments by the pilots' Negotiating Committee, past MEC officers, and the pilots. "Thanks to our negotiators and the support of our dedicated union staff, our pilots have been justly rewarded for their loyalty and constant professionalism," Gold says. "They should be extremely proud of their contributions that have resulted in the company's success."

Even with a new contract in hand, Gold has no intentions of taking it easy. With the support of MEC committee volunteers, the motivated pilot group plans to ensure that management adheres to the provisions in their agreement. Gold says, "We now have stricter contract language, but we also hope to continue what has been a cooperative relationship with our employer, whenever possible, to successfully resolve any grievance issues that might arise."

In addition to keeping a vigilant watch over contract enforcement, the MEC is focused on maintaining the unity that the pilot group demonstrated during the negotiations process: "The team effort that developed during the past year bodes well for the future of our pilot group. More than ever, our pilots know we are an integral part of Kelowna's continued success," Gold declares.

With members spread across six time zones and some 5,700 miles from coast to coast, it has been challenging to keep the group connected and well-informed about the many benefits ALPA membership provides. With assistance from ALPA's Communications Department staff, the MEC recently began sending regularly scheduled e-mail newsletters to its pilot members and is presently working on a new KFC MEC website that will feature useful and timely information. Plans are also in the works to introduce family awareness events in Kelowna hub cities once the long Canadian winter passes.

Collectively, the pilot group has chosen to take steps toward building an improved career path that will also benefit the company so that, together, they can focus on growth. Kelowna Flightcraft is one of only two freight airlines in Canada providing widebody, heavy-lift dedicated airplanes and is keen on capitalizing on the expanding demand of this niche market. With the new pilot contract in place, management can now turn its focus on expanding the widebody fleet.

Kelowna Flightcraft moves approximately 600,000 pounds of freight every night and about 300,000 additional pounds for Canada Post. Add it up and it is evident that Canadian commerce depends heavily on the Kelowna pilots pushing nearly a million pounds of freight across the country each night.

Besides moving freight with B-727s and Convair 580s on behalf of Purolator Courier, Kelowna Flightcraft, which has become Canada's third largest airline, provides dedicated DC-10 cargo service for Canada Post. The pilots of Kelowna Flightcraft are spread across domiciles that range from Halifax, N.S., to Vancouver, B.C.

KFC at a Glance

Pilots Joined ALPA: 1997 (became an ALPA-represented pilot group when CALPA merged with ALPA)
First ALPA Contract: Nov. 1, 1997
Number of Pilots: 125
Headquarters: Kelowna, B.C.
Pilot Bases: Hamilton, Ont.; Vancouver, B.C.; Halifax, N.S.; Thunder Bay, Ont.; Regina, Sask.; Calgary, Alb.; Kelowna, B.C.
Fleet: B-727s, Convair 580s, DC-10s