

Last December, the pilots of North American Airlines made a choice about their representation: a powerful 96 percent of the NAA pilots who voted in the representation election chose ALPA over the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)—their collective bargaining representative before the election.

The change in representation came as a result of the pilots' frustration over management's disregard for the pilots' contract and a union, when it

became involved, that often took action on the pilots' behalf without consulting them or getting their feedback.

"Having witnessed the vote tally..., it was clear that the election result was an overwhelming endorsement of the need for change in how our contract is being interpreted by North American," said the pilots' Master Executive Council officers in a letter to NAA's senior vice-president and COO.

Indeed, contract enforcement is the top priority for the pilots as they begin their work to build their union. "A key aspect of our mission will be to protect and administer our contract with every available ALPA resource and prepare for our next round of collective bargaining," says Capt. Al Gallo, the pilot group's MEC chairman. "Our management has never had to deal with


the power of a unified pilot group with the resources of a committed national union. With ALPA representing us, they do now," he adds.

The MEC officers, along with the chairmen of the pilots' Membership, Grievance, and Central Air Safety Committees, came to Herndon, Va., the first week in January to learn more about the resources available to them and their pilots through ALPA. While all of the NAA representatives who attended the orientation and training had been ALPA members previously, meeting with the staff, national officers, and other ALPA pilot leaders underscored their reasons

for choosing ALPA as their bargaining representative.

The new NAA reps learned how ALPA's Representation Department helps pilots prepare for negotiations, plan strategically, and enforce their contract. The IT Department demonstrated an online grievance form that the NAA pilots agreed they would implement immediately to facilitate grievance processing. As much of their flying is international, they also took special notice of the benefits available to the pilots through ALPA's affiliation with IFALPA and the access they have to information worldwide through the Association's website.

During the 2-day meeting, the MEC officers and committee chairmen learned more about ALPA's structure and how the Finance, Membership and Council Services, and Purchasing Departments help the officers and status reps set up their operations and conduct business. They also learned how the Communications, Economic and Financial Analysis, and Retirement and Insurance Departments work with the MEC to gather and evaluation information, make strategic decisions, and implement initiatives to advance their pilot group's goals. They heard from Engineering and Air Safety Department staff about the vast resources, programs, and support available to their pilots regarding aviation safety and security and received a briefing from Government Affairs staff on the legislative and regulatory initiatives ALPA is undertaking to further airline pilots' interests. Throughout the orientation, the NAA pilots focused their questions and comments on how they could best use these services and staff expertise and experience to their pilots' advantage.

In the coming weeks, the pilots will be tapping into these resources as they implement an aggressive membership drive, establish their MEC and committees, and build their "new union." As the MEC officers said in a New Year's message to the pilots, "We strongly believe that we can work within the contract to achieve our goals of job security, improved quality of life, and total transparency of all actions taken by both NAA [management] and the MEC.... We look forward to the challenges ahead because we now have...the commitment and resources of ALPA." 

North American

Pilots Build a New Union with ALPA Resources

By Barbara Gottshalk
ALPA Lead Communications Specialist



NAA MEC officers meet in ALPA's Herndon, Va., offices for orientation.

NAA at a Glance

Pilots Joined ALPA: 2009

Number of Pilots: 190

Pilot Base: New York (JFK)

Headquarters: Jamaica, N.Y.

Operations: North American Airlines provides worldwide charter operations for the U.S. military, tour operators, government agencies, sports teams, and other airlines

Fleet: 5 B-767-300ERs, 5 B-757-200s