

Wasaya

Pilots Forge Ahead Despite Stalled Negotiations

By Kimberly Seitz, ALPA Senior Communications Specialist



Wasaya is headquartered in Thunder Bay, Ont., Canada. The pilots fly 24 aircraft including the Beech 1900D shown above.

WSG at a Glance

Pilots Joined ALPA: 2008

Number of Pilots: 90

Operations: Charter, cargo, and scheduled passenger services to 25 First Nation communities in northwestern Ontario and Timmins, Ont.

Pilot Domiciles: Red Lake, Ont.; Sioux Lookout, Ont.; Timmins, Ont.; Thunder Bay, Ont.; and Winnipeg, Man.

Headquarters: Wholly owned by a First Nations consortium and based in Thunder Bay, Ont.

Fleet: 24 aircraft, including Beech 1900Ds, Caravan C-208Bs, Hawker Siddeley HS748s, and Pilatus PC-12s

Despite signing an Essential Services Agreement that prohibits a strike or lockout if or when negotiations fail, the Wasaya pilots continue to aggressively pursue their first contract with a management team that has been less than cooperative. To support the pilots' valiant struggle in the face of such adversity, the ALPA Executive Council awarded the Wasaya pilots a \$250,000 grant from the Association's Major Contingency Fund (MCF).

The grant was announced at a pilot briefing that Wasaya pilots; Master Executive Council representatives; and Canada Board president, Capt. Dan Adamus (Air Canada Jazz), and vice-president, Capt. Nick DiCintio (Air Canada Jazz) attended in Thunder Bay, Ont., in early December 2009. ALPA's president, Capt. John Prater, who was unable

to attend the briefing, confirmed the grant via teleconference from the White House. Prater was representing the Association at a summit on creating jobs in the U.S. The award from ALPA's

war chest, which will go before the Executive Board for approval, will support continuing strategic activities now that the Wasaya collective bargaining process has reached an impasse.

"Our highly experienced negotiating team has been laboring for more than 18 months to achieve a fair and equitable contract," says Capt. Jeff Braun, the pilots' MEC chairman. "And ALPA's additional financial support puts us in the strongest possible position to achieve the outcome we seek—a viable, profitable, and sustainable airline."

Pursuant to the Canada Labour Code, which governs negotiations in Canada, the Maintenance of Activities and Dispute Resolution Agreement, or the aforementioned Essential Services Agreement, that the pilots and management approved concludes that the

cessation of flying, in whole or in part during the course of a strike or lockout, has the potential to cause an immediate and serious danger to the safety and health of the public.

Because Wasaya provides the majority of charter, cargo and scheduled passenger service to 25 First Nation communities in remote areas of northwestern Ontario—many of which are only accessible via air—Wasaya pilot jobs are considered essential positions.

Wasaya pilots deliver most, if not all, necessities, including fuel, food, and medicine to these remote communities of 400–2,500 residents. With roads scarce, most winter travel in the region is by snowmobiles, flown in on Wasaya airplanes. Much of the pilots' flying is in temperatures well below freezing, landing on short gravel and, many times, icy runways.

After 18 months of negotiating with limited success, the Wasaya pilots applied for the appointment of a conciliation officer from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services (FMCS) on December 3, pursuant to the Maintenance of Activities and Dispute Resolution Agreement. On December 12, the FMCS appointed the regional director of the Ontario region of FMCS as the conciliation officer assigned to Wasaya. Conciliation dates are confirmed for January and February 2010.

In other news, the pilots are vehemently opposed to management's flawed use of data gathered from the Safety Management System (SMS) program. Though Canada is a leader in its adoption of SMS in its marine, rail, and aviation industries as a means to improve safety, Wasaya management uses it for a different purpose: disciplinary action.

"If a pilot files a report, management figures he or she must have done something wrong, and therefore, he or she must be disciplined," says Braun. "To think that a program designed to enhance the safety culture at an airline is now being used to discipline the very pilots who understand the system and want to use it to improve the airline is patently absurd."

The Wasaya MEC has directed ALPA staff to take these disciplinary acts to arbitration for resolution. 🌀