

# ALPA: The Airline Pilots' Own

By Capt. Duane Woerth, ALPA President



Anyone who has ever rented a house knows how stressful it can be. Some landlords fail to keep the appliances in working order and expect you to fix them at your own expense. In tight housing markets, landlords are always trying to break the lease or raise the rent. After all, they know that someone is desperate to find a place to live. Landlords and tenants don't

make long-term commitments to each other. On the other hand, anyone who has ever bought a house knows the pride of owning a home. "A man's home is his castle," no matter how humble it may seem to the rest of the world. And we take care of our home, not just because it's an investment, but also because our home is a reflection of ourselves.

Since ALPA's founding on July 27, 1931, generations of airline pilots have been taking care of their own house, the House of ALPA. This house was never a building in Chicago, or Washington, D.C., or suburban Virginia. This house was not held up by a constitution or policy documents. And this house was most certainly never the property of any elected representative. This house has always been, and will always be, the shelter provided by the collective will of every dues-paying ALPA member.

Over the course of our proud history, ALPA's owners have had to fight to protect the value of their profession. Many of the core issues we are battling over today are timeless. Dave Behncke and his "Key Men" struggled in the 1930s to prevent pilot pushing and to get basic federal regulations to deal with the safety hazard of fatigue. Today, airline pilots are finding that fresh attacks on flight and duty time regulations have a familiar catalyst—the insatiable desire of management to extract more flying hours out of a 24-hour day.

Now that many of our best work rules have been stripped down to FAR minimums, some airline managements are on the hunt for actual exemptions from some regulations to gain one more competitive advantage. If the FAA succumbs to these requests, the floodgates will open as every management will demand the same to level the playing field. They won't mind at all if that playing field is littered with airline pilots battered by exhaustion.

The last five years have seen a remarkable toll on our profession from unprecedented threats: global terror, transnational deregulation, \$60 per barrel oil, the near-total bankruptcy of the North American airline industry, and a largely unsympathetic administration. The attack on our contracts has been staggering. Pay, benefits, work



rules, and job security provisions that took generations to achieve have been gutted by many airlines, largely via the fiat of pro-management bankruptcy judges.

Meanwhile, 21st century airline managements are aggressively creating "virtual airlines," in which more than

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half of the flying is outsourced to a swelling list of capacity vendors eager to rent seats at any cost. Managements' clear message to us is simple. "We own the brand; you pilots are all just low-bid part-time renters." Make no mistake; the airline holding company shell game is rapidly evolving into a nightmare, greatly assisted by the bankruptcy process. The truth is that management does own the brand and our current scope clauses are short-term leases at best.

This House of ALPA, the one thing pilots own, is the best hope to combat airline managements' attempts to stretch flight and duty times, lower the bar on our contracts even further, or implement their "virtual airline" schemes. Their divide-and-conquer strategy can be stopped only when every ALPA member acts like a co-owner and treats every other pilot as a partner in this union and this profession that we share.

We won't just be remembering history as we celebrate our 75th anniversary, we will be making it. The year 2006 is shaping up to be a pivotal year as the airline industry begins to emerge from the worst period in its history. It is up to us to decide whether to act, collectively, like co-owners and partners or to compete for short-term job rentals.

What do you say, partner?