

Key the Mike



By Capt. John Prater, ALPA President

The need to communicate within any democratic group presents tremendous challenges as well as opportunities in the



attempt to connect with members. Each of my predecessors struggled to determine how to most effectively communicate with ALPA's elected representatives and members.

In 1985, ALPA's president, Capt. Hank Duffy, in coordination with the United Master Executive Council, took ALPA's communication efforts to new heights.

From the communications mainstay of telexes and then faxes transmitted between field offices, to pilots lining up at the terminal pay phones to listen to MEC code-a-phones, to the birth of computerized messaging, cell phones, pilot-to-pilot networks, videotapes, family awareness meetings, and nationwide teleconferences, ALPA has propelled itself to being the leading union, and possibly the leading membership organization, in the field of communications. Reporting on ABC's *Nightly News* in 1985, Chicago correspondent Chris Bury stated that ALPA had set a new communications standard for all of organized labor to emulate.

Throughout the ensuing decades, ALPA has remained at the forefront of communications, and it has been no easy task. I was reminded of that fact when the Board of Directors met in October 2008 to establish our union's strategic initiatives and move them forward, and a constantly recurring theme was how our union communicates with its members and how to evolve to the next level.

We live in an information-hungry world that demands instant gratification. Our members have said that they have the same expectations regarding news about our union. As we navigate through the ever-changing available technology, it's even more vital that we choose a way to communicate with our members that is direct, efficient, and inviting. Whether our purpose is to raise awareness about the latest retirement and insurance benefits achieved by the hard work of ALPA members, staff, and lobbyists (see page 14) or our renewed vow to grow our union (see page 18), we intend to inform our members about the opportunities as well as the challenges we face.

You are no doubt familiar with ALPA's award-winning print communications and with our webcasts, DVDs, podcasts, and ongoing website upgrade. Your Board understands the vital link between exceptional two-way, high-tech/high-touch communications and the ability of our

pilot groups to exert their collective power. This is why the BOD has encouraged your officers and staff to redouble their efforts to enhance ALPA's website; to improve the communications structure among local councils, MECs, and ALPA national; to reinvigorate ALPA's National Pilot Spokesman Program; and to put information in our pilots' hands wherever they are and exactly when they need it.

It's a new day, and ALPA will continue to lead the way in communicating with its members, but you are a critical part of that process. If you don't key the mike and let your voices be heard, then we are just reporting, not communicating. It takes two or more, hopefully 52,000-plus more, to have proactive, meaningful, and effective communications.

When the BOD raised this issue, we had a noteworthy example to follow. Whether (or not) you voted for incoming President Obama, it's hard to deny the groundbreaking, innovative communications/outreach strategy that was used during his U.S. presidential campaign.

Obama spoke directly to the voters via web video when

If you don't key the mike and let your voices be heard, then we are just reporting, not communicating.

he announced his candidacy and when asking for their support. He transposed his weekly radio addresses—a medium begun by President Ronald Reagan to bypass news media interpretations of his remarks—into videos that play on YouTube on demand. Using 21st-century technology, he plans to express his views and make policy announcements to us directly, in our homes, anytime we invite him in.

The Washington Post staff writer Chris Cillizza pointed out in a recent article that incoming President Obama will now face the task of making his successful campaign communications strategy work equally as well from the Oval Office. I suspect that he can do it. And I can tell you that, using all the communications tools that science and technology have to offer, ALPA will succeed in enhancing its communication capabilities between our members and elected leaders. Debate, consensus, and decisions, followed by the unified action of members and representatives sharing complete information, is, after all, the ultimate goal of your union's communications effort.

John Prater