

One Common Truth



By Capt. John Prater, ALPA President



On the eve of the 43rd meeting of ALPA's Board of Directors—and in the early dawn of our ninth decade as the world's largest airline pilots union—it is only natural to glance at our six before returning with intense focus to our future.

Many of the pioneer airlines and call signs—Aloha, Braniff, Eastern, Pan Am—are missing from today's skies, and we dare not forget their history at the risk of losing our grasp on the yoke of tomorrow. And the rich stories of those pilot groups whose futures are intertwined through past mergers—Allegheny, Hughes AirWest, Lake Central, North Central, Northwest, Ozark, Piedmont, Republic, Southern, TWA, Western, along with many more—are also a part of this union's history and foundation, which we continue to build upon. And let's not forget our pilots who flew for AirBC, Aspen, Britt, Canadian Regional, Emery, Frontier, Midway, Midwest, Muse, Nova, Ontario, Rio, Rocky, and others—they, too, are etched into ALPA's history.

Celestial ports and radio beacons gave way to modern navigation tools. Likewise the interactions between labor and managements, legislators and regulators, bankruptcy courts and Wall Street bankers continue to evolve to manage the moderate turbulence that seems endless. While we look fondly on those airline founders and present managers who care about this industry as much as we do, we have waged war against our arch rivals and union busters when necessary. After all, our profession is just a business to them.

Other obstacles in our flight path? Wild swings in the price of jet fuel, which became as normal as takeoffs and landings. Security threats and airline crashes, which have changed over the years, yet remain dreadfully the same. Pilot error still remains the easy scapegoat, hindering a path to careful and thorough investigation that just might reveal a business model or system flaw.

As we approach 100 years of airline service with the celebration of Capt. Tony Jannus' flights in the Benoist aircraft "Lark of Duluth," our futures as airline pilots are tied by one common truth: we are all inherently joined to an organization that our founders named the Air Line Pilots Association.

The number of accomplishments made by this union since its inception is impressive. And still there are some who would blame every airline failure or contract setback on those few pilots who dared to represent our members ignoring what could have only been achieved through our union—a union that would be pointless without the men and women who willingly work to make our profession

succeed on every front. Our collective success is tied to those who diligently strive to better the piloting profession through every day of turmoil and strife for the good of *all* airline pilots. Because being too big to care about others is not a successful strategy for pilot unions.

If you have had the notion that this profession is better off without a union or that it would be more advantageous to be a part of an independent union, I encourage you to review our scorecard (see page 24) from the 2008 Board of Directors strategic planning process. If your priority is missing, let your local council representatives know what you'd like your union to address for 2010 and beyond.

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Blame and accusations get us nowhere. I respectfully ask that you lift up your heads and see why pilot groups need each other in this complex industry designed with business plans that include outsourcing and union busting. We need each other—our collective spirit far surpasses the strength of a sole individual, no matter how fierce and determined one might be. Airline pilots range from the most intense "Type A" personalities to those with a wide array of characteristics, yet all have deeply held convictions that lead to debates and divides as wide as the Grand Canyon. Yet we long ago discovered that aircraft formations were harder to destroy than the solo flyer.

Our scorecard specifically illustrates how hard your representatives and volunteers work on your behalf, and the sacrifices they make for you and your families. After the 2008 Board of Directors delegates set the course for ALPA's future, those same representatives worked tirelessly with volunteers on a local and national level to ensure that we met and, in some areas, surpassed our goals.

Keep in mind that our union is not too big to fail. But it won't. We have aviators and labor leaders who care far too much to let that happen. I am proud to call them union sisters and brothers. They are your union representatives, and together they are ALPA's Board of Directors.

From those who built our history to those of today who will determine our future, I offer my thanks and appreciation for your continuing efforts.