Continental

Pilots Demonstrate Strength, Resilience Through Merger
By Amy Flanagan, ALPA Senior Communications Specialist

The Continental pilots continued to demonstrate their resilience and ability to ward off threats in 2011 as the Continental-United merger progressed. The year began with the pilots’ strictly enforcing a favorable arbitration award over management’s decision to test the limits of the pilots’ collective bargaining agreement. Management violated scope provisions by assigning the CO code to United feeder flights using jet aircraft with more than 50 seats, culminating in another ALPA win with a second award and monetary damages in October.

In June, Continental pilots also fought against management’s other attempts to seek shortcuts to the merger process. One grievance challenges management’s violations of the contract’s scope provisions that prevent fleet reductions during the period of separate operations if the reductions are related to the merger. Another grievance challenges management’s failure to maintain the same or higher twin-aisle ratios of scheduled Continental-United flying that existed before the merger.

Says Capt. Jay Pierce, the pilots’ Master Executive Council (MEC) chairman, “We have let management know that there is a simple way to achieve the benefits it wants from the merger—negotiate with the pilots and reach agreement on a new joint contract. Until then, we will do everything necessary to ensure that management’s contractual obligations under our existing collective bargaining agreement are adhered to.”

Strong contract enforcement is only one aspect of the pilots’ multi-pronged approach for dealing with the merger and with management. In support of contract negotiations for the joint collective bargaining agreement (JCBA) and to build unity throughout both pilot groups, Continental pilots reached out to their fellow pilots at United. Pilots and families participated in an extensive series of joint Family Awareness events and the pilots held joint MEC meetings and joint informational pickets, including one featuring more than 700 pilots in what became the largest pilot picketing event ever held on Wall Street.

Continental pilots regularly take their message to the news media and to the investment community, joined where possible by United pilots, to remind all that true merger progress and management’s touted merger synergies cannot be realized without pilots, a ratified JCBA, a successful seniority list integration, and a combined pilot group. The final prong is a unified Joint Negotiating Committee that works seamlessly to represent all Continental and United pilots in its contract negotiations efforts.

While progress on the JCBA has been disappointing and significantly slower than desired or expected, the pilots have reached agreements in principle on nine sections and one letter of agreement. The effort continues to push forward, and the pilots remain unified in their demands for a contract that reflects their contributions to the airline.

The Continental pilots have much to look forward to in 2012. United Continental Holdings, Inc. continues a pattern of growth that began in 2011 with the last of the returning Continental furloughees completing training and rejoining their fellow pilots back on the line, a new Los Angeles, Calif., base, and hiring new Continental pilots. The much-anticipated B-787 Dreamliner may finally make its arrival. And while the new United was awarded a single operating certificate in November 2011 and the Continental call sign slipped into the history books, two things are clear: until a JCBA is ratified, the pilots’ seniority lists are integrated, and the two pilots groups are combined, Continental will continue to operate separately from United, and the proud and storied Continental heritage will be firmly entwined in the DNA of the future combined airline. The operational practices, training methods, and safety culture borrowed from Continental, as well as the cultural heritage of the airline and the Continental pilots, will be melded with the strengths of United and its pilots to forge a new airline that exemplifies the best from each legacy airline.

Pierce adds, “We’ve made some progress in 2011, but there’s still a lot of work to do in 2012. The JCBA remains a top priority, as do all of the steps necessary to ensure that the promised benefits from the Continental-United merger that are due the pilots are realized. We are fortunate that we have the resources of ALPA available, and the commitment of ALPA leaders, to help us achieve these goals.”

CAL at a Glance
- Pilots joined ALPA: 2001
- Number of pilots: 4,763
- Pilot bases/hubs: Newark, N.J.; Houston, Tex.; Cleveland, Ohio; Guam; Los Angeles, Calif.
- Headquarters: Chicago, Ill.
- Fleet: 25 B-787-8s/-9s (on order), 22 B-777-200ERs, 10/16 B-767-200ERs/-400ERs, 41/21 B-757-200s/-300s, 37/36/127/12/32 B-737-500s/-700s/-800s/-900s/-900ERs

Continental

Pilots march on Wall Street to show their frustration with the slow progress of the Continental-United merger.