PIEDMONT

Contract Amendments Include Flow Up To Parent Airline

By Jan W. Steenblik, Technical Editor

On Sept. 16, 2014, the pilots of Piedmont Airlines voted to ratify amendments to their current collective bargaining agreement. With 86 percent of the pilot group participating in the ballot, 77 percent of those pilots voted to approve the modifications to their current contract, which include plans to refleet the airline as well as guaranteed hiring opportunities for Piedmont pilots with the airline’s parent company, American Airlines.

“With much of our fleet of Dash 8s nearing replacement age, we needed to look long term as to what was best for the pilots on the property now, and what would provide career opportunities for pilots just joining Piedmont,” explains Capt. Bruce Freedman, the pilots’ Master Executive Council (MEC) chairman. “Our pilot group’s relationship with management remains positive and cooperative.”

Under the modified agreement, Piedmont pilots can now take advantage of a seniority-based flow-through procedure to fly at American Airlines, and pilots have secured flying at Piedmont by obtaining minimum fleet commitments. In exchange, Piedmont pilots agreed to increase their share of medical premium payments and, over time, revise pay scales to reflect more commonly used industry approaches.

With the opportunity for flow through to American Airlines and no interview or physical examination required as part of that process, Piedmont is continually hiring and running new-hire classes. The company’s pilot staffing fluctuates between 350 and 400 pilots.

American Airlines Group recently announced that 20 Embraer ERJ 145 turbojets would be placed at Piedmont during the first quarter of 2016. Piedmont management is currently reviewing what will have to be done regarding training, manuals, domiciles, and FAA requirements to bring jets to the property.

Piedmont Airlines, Inc. is a regional airline flying as US Airways Express. A wholly owned subsidiary of American Airlines Group, Piedmont is headquartered near Salisbury, Md. The airline’s main base is Wicomico Regional Airport in Salisbury, with hubs at PHL, CLT, and DCA.

Piedmont’s roots go back to 1962, when founder Richard Henson, an FBO owner in Hagerstown, Md., launched scheduled flights to DCA under the Hagerstown Commuter name, which was later changed to Henson Airlines. Henson rebranded itself in 1967 as an Allegheny Commuter that fed Allegheny Airlines (later to become US Air, which became US Airways, which in turn merged with American Airlines). US Air resurrected the Piedmont brand name in 1993, honoring the B-737 airline that US Air absorbed in 1989.

Over the years, the airline has flown and retired a series of turboprops—Beech 99s, Short Brothers 330s, and DHC-7s. Now the Dash 8s are nearing retirement, too.

Piedmont’s pilots fly into some of the busiest “keep your speed up on final” capitals of the U.S. East Coast—BOS, CLT, DCA, EWR, LGA, and PHL. They regularly deal with icing and low ceilings in the winter, embedded thunderstorms in the summer, and all the other challenges that characterize flying east of the Appalachians.

Piedmont currently serves 47 destinations in the eastern United States with approximately 300 daily flights in 27 DHC-8-100s and 11 -300s. The route system extends from Watertown, N.Y., to Hilton Head, S.C., and as far west as Huntington, W.Va.

“With jets on the way and rapid flow through to the mainline, our pilots are looking at rapid upgrades to captain and a brighter future than they’ve seen on the horizon in many years,” Freedman says.