



Embattled Trans States Pilots Stand Strong

By Kimberly Seitz, Communications Specialist

Amid the turmoil surrounding the firing of two key union leaders, the creation of an alter-ego airline, alleged management intimidation of pilots filing grievances, and generally strained labor relations, Trans States pilots continue to fly in the professional manner upon which they've built their reputation.

"I am proud to serve as the Master Executive Council chairman for such an amazing group of dedicated and professional pilots," says Capt. Dario Miranda, who is serving his third term as MEC chairman of the beleaguered pilot group. "Our professional commitment to TSA and our industry is what sets us apart from the competition, and we will continue to prove to TSA management that the pilots of Trans States Airlines are among aviation's finest."

Labor/management relations at TSA have been strained for the last few years. In a letter to TSA President and Chief Operating Officer Richard Leach in July 2004, ALPA's president, Capt. Duane Woerth, expressed his concern regarding the fractured labor relations at TSA and, more importantly, his desire and willingness to improve those relations.

"ALPA has always been willing to work with our airline management to accom-

modate their needs when those needs are warranted," Capt. Woerth wrote.

"While we are not always able to reach total agreement on all

issues," he wrote, "we are always willing to try." On Oct. 26, 2004, TSA management informed TSA employees of their intent to pursue another operating certificate and to create a sister carrier to fly 70-seat or larger jets. This announcement, however, came only after management had previously refused to agree with the TSA MEC to an industry-average pay rate for this larger aircraft or to apply the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement for negotiating pay rates for new equipment. As a result, TSA management blamed the MEC for

preventing TSA from acquiring larger aircraft.

In 2004, however, management changed its story, saying instead that the scope clause in the Allied Pilots Association's contract with American Airlines prevented TSA from operating 70-seat aircraft.

TSA operates as American Connection in a code-share agreement with American.

"Trans States management has repeatedly tried to circumvent the promises upon which they agreed when they signed our contract," says Capt. Miranda, about TSA management's creation of GoJet Airlines.

TSA and ALPA



Capt. David A. Schmidt (Trans States) greets passengers as they board at Richmond International Airport.

PHOTOS: GARY DINUNNO

A Trans States EMB-145 in United Express livery leaves Richmond International Airport. BELOW: F/O Matthew A. Charipar (Trans States) begins his departure routine for a US Airways Express flight.



signed their current collective bargaining agreement in July 2000 after narrowly averting a strike. That contract becomes amendable July 31, 2006, and negotiations are slated to begin in February 2006.

In December 2004, TSA management submitted an application for GoJet Airlines LLC to the Department of Transportation requesting a certificate of public convenience and necessity to engage in interstate and foreign scheduled air transportation of persons, property, and mail. In April 2005, United Airlines announced it had reached an agreement with GoJet Airlines to fly 10 CRJ-700s under the United Express banner (flying that Air Wisconsin Airways Corporation currently does).

Labor/management relations took a definite downward turn in February 2005, when Capt. Jason Kagan, chairman of the TSA pilots' Grievance Committee, was fired. Shortly thereafter, Capt. Paul Hopkins, Local Executive Council 39 captain representative, was also fired. Both men have spotless disciplinary records. Both actions are being contested in the grievance process at TSA.

Cpts. Kagan and Hopkins were very active in the union and quite vocal in their defense of TSA pilots. Capt. Kagan, in his 3 years of service as Grievance Committee chairman, successfully represented many TSA pilots and recovered substantial sums of money from management.

"I didn't get into union work because I disliked management," explains Capt. Kagan. "I got into union work because I disliked management's attitude about my contract and my union."

Capt. Hopkins was a member of the pilots' Negotiating Committee in 2000, when the current contract was negotiated, and his role as LEC 39 captain representative provided ample opportunity to come face-to-face with TSA management during disciplinary actions against the pilots at his domicile. The ALPA Executive Council, during its May 2005 meeting, approved flight pay loss for both Cpts. Hopkins and Kagan while their grievances are pending.

During this tumultuous time, TSA management voluntarily recognized the Teamsters as the bargaining rep-



resentative for the pilots of GoJet, the start-up airline. This scheme involved the submission of authorization cards signed by only four management-selected pilots to the National Mediation Board and a Feb. 7, 2005, request for certification. The NMB certified the Teamsters request to represent the "personnel described as 'pilots,' employees of GoJet Airlines, Inc." on April 11.

The Teamsters voluntarily revoked the certification April 21, after ALPA alerted the NMB and the union that the alleged airline had no active pilots, aircraft, or operating certificate, and therefore, the voluntary recognition was both illegal and premature.

In a show of unity and solidarity, ALPA and the TSA MEC staged a pilot rally at Lambert-St. Louis Airport on May 10. More than 200 pilots attended the rally to hear Capt. Woerth and one of ALPA's executive vice-presidents, Capt. Tom Wychor, Mesaba MEC chairman,

express their concern about the situation and reaffirm ALPA's support and commitment to fight for the TSA pilots. Representatives from a dozen ALPA pilot groups were on hand to lend their support for the beleaguered TSA pilots.

Capt. Wychor began working closely with the TSA MEC in early 2005, when the MEC approached ALPA to develop a strategic communications campaign to disseminate information to the pilot group and to create support for the union on ongoing issues at TSA. Capt. Wychor had faced a similar threat when Mesaba purchased Big Sky Airlines as a "growth vehicle" in 2002.

"We've been there, and we had the support of ALPA and 66,000 pilots," Capt. Wychor told the crowd. "Your fight is our fight. We stand with you to defend these unjustly terminated pilots and to educate all pilots everywhere about the danger that the proliferation of alter-ego carriers like GoJet poses to our profession.

"Pilots from across ALPA are here with you," Capt. Wychor continued, "because the latest battle to defend our profession is here, now, today. Working together, we will secure your future."

Capt. Woerth took up the battle cry, saying that the situation was "the same old circus with different clowns." He explained that the regional jet industry began in 1965 with the launch of the DC-9, which carried as many passengers as the CRJ-700—the airplane that GoJet will be flying under the United Express banner.

A Trans States EMB-145 in US Airways livery sits on the ramp at Richmond International Airport.



"In 1965, pilots made more money than what GoJet pilots are paid today," said Capt. Woerth. "Are we going to let that happen?" The crowd responded with a resounding, "NO."

"We can do one of two things," Capt. Woerth explained. "We can build this company together, or we can have a battleground. The choice is up to management. If they want to use this opportunity as a building block, we can do that. But if they want a battleground, we can do that, too!"

Capt. Woerth recognized the strong commitment that Trans States pilots have to their airline, noting the difficult periods that the pilot group had endured to keep the company flying.

"We built this airline, we saved it, we worked tirelessly through all the dark hours of TWA and the transfer to American. Trans States exists today only because of YOU," he continued, "and we are not going to walk away or be pushed out of it. If TSA has a future with a 70-seat jet operation—and I hope it's a bright future—it's going to have to work with us, because it's not going to work without us.

"Anybody who tells you this is a unique situation is making excuses," Capt. Woerth said. "I'm not here to listen to excuses. I'm here to make a deal to put your seniority list into this new company and make it a success."

ALPA leaders and TSA management are attempting to find mutually agreeable solutions and to resolve the issues surrounding GoJet, along with other issues of labor/management relations.

During the May Executive Board Meeting in Washington, D.C., the Air Wisconsin MEC submitted a resolution in support of Trans States pilots that was unanimously approved. The resolution reads in part that "the ALPA Executive Council consider additional appropriate measures to be taken by the Association if this dispute is not resolved in a satisfactory manner by its next regular meeting."

"Our resolution is strong, and our unity is monumental," says Capt. Miranda. "This is OUR airline, and we want to make sure we are on the front lines of its growth." 🌐

TSA Pilot Group at a Glance

Number of Pilots: 652

Operations: More than 352 flights to more than 60 cities serving two million passengers annually

Pilot Domiciles: St. Louis, Mo. and Richmond, Va.

Corporate Headquarters: St. Louis, Mo.

Equipment: 62 aircraft, including 35 Embraer ERJ-145 regional jets; 1 ATR 42 and 1 ATR 72 turboprops; 25 Jetstream J-41 turboprops

Alliances: Regional feeder airline for American Airlines, United Airlines, and US Airways