



Gemini Air Cargo Steps Forward In 2006

Editor's note: Air Line Pilot invited Gemini's new elected leader to offer his thoughts on how the group's first contract has been enforced and what the group's prospects are for the future.

By Capt. Bill Atchison, Gemini MEC Chairman

Since March 2002, Gemini Air Cargo's flightcrew members have worked to become established members of ALPA. In September 2004, Gemini's flightcrew members ratified their first agreement between ALPA and Gemini Air Cargo, Inc., joining the ranks of others who saw the need for agreements between managements and employees. From the beginning, there has been a sense of cooperation between Gemini's senior management and flightcrew members that exists to this day. That's probably why it took us a while to realize that to deal with the toughest issues between employees and management, we would need to be a part of a real union.

As we conclude our second year of a 5-year agreement, the life of a Gemini flightcrew member has improved measurably. Of course, that doesn't mean that there isn't room for improvement in future negotiations. We didn't take a rest when, after nearly 2 years of negotiations, our current agreement was drafted and ratified in 2004 by two-thirds of Gemini flightcrew members. While we didn't get everything we want in our first collective bargaining

agreement, that contract provides for reopening a limited number of contract sections in 2006. So, we'll soon have another opportunity to make improvements. Gemini management has initially been approachable

and positive regarding these upcoming negotiations.

One reason why our pre-ALPA in-house committee approach fell short of the needs and expectations of both senior management and the flightcrew members of Gemini was because it lacked the legal enforcement language that our contract now gives us. Before anyone talked about inviting ALPA onto the property, even before the idea of an in-house committee was considered, flightcrew members and management seemed to have good communications. Management would make efforts to get information out to the employees. A call-in hotline that was updated, like clockwork, every Friday afternoon provided information, ranging from unimportant to very important, for everybody to hear. But the bottom line was that management decided what we heard, and that gave it too much control. While management certainly pulled back once we began to talk about ALPA, we soon picked up the slack and started to build our own message and our own unity in the process.

While the Gemini flightcrew member force is small—approximately 250—the majority of flightcrew members



PHOTOS: JOCELYN AUGUSTINO

have been here since we began talks to become an ALPA-represented flightcrew member group. Many Gemini crewmembers saw the difficulties of trying to make an in-house committee work and have also experienced the predictable struggle of understanding what it means to be part of a national union.

One lesson the flightcrew members have learned is that success is the product of a long process—not an overnight revelation. The fact that a first agreement was ratified and signed was the first step in that journey. Under the 2004 agreement, the Gemini wage scale moved forward by only 2 percent since 2002, but many pilot groups swallowed concessions during the same period.

A signed agreement provided us with improvements in our quality of life and work rules that we could not have had without it being a living legal document. But our agreement still has room for improvement that will help flightcrew members as well as the company.

Our first agreement signed by ALPA and Gemini Air Cargo, Inc., provided us with a foundation upon which we can build. Our flightcrew members ratified the first

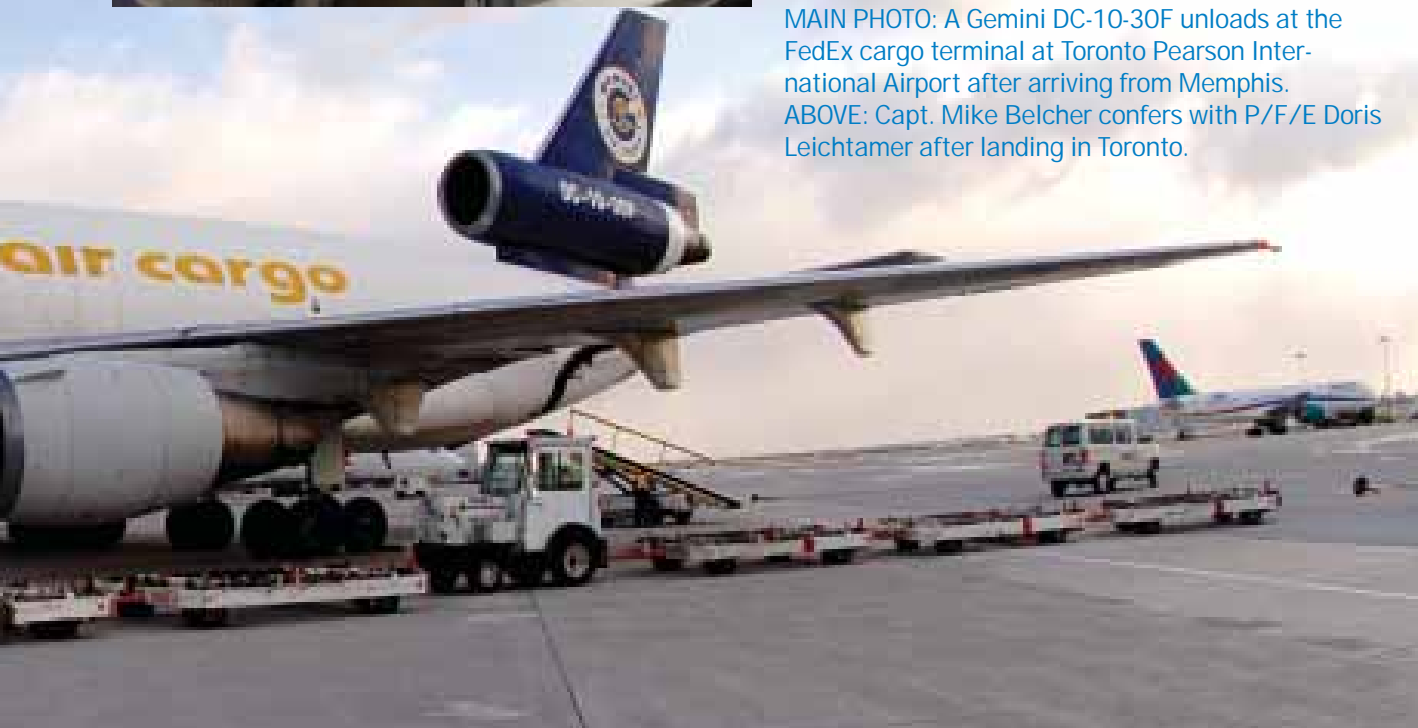
contract because they felt it was adequate for them at the time to fulfill the need to have a labor agreement in place. The number of flightcrew members who took the time to gather information, participate in committee activities, and even to vote on important issues fell short of our expectations and is now a focus of our internal efforts. I remind everybody that people who enter into an agreement to work under rules spelled out in a legal document give up their right to complain when they fail to participate in the process that makes that document breathe. As [Capt.] Duane Woerth, [ALPA's president,] has said, "Democracy is a sport for participants, not observers."

Until now, I have spoken about Gemini Air Cargo, its employees who operate airplanes for them, and what they have done collectively to be where they are today with ALPA. I now want to focus on what needs to be done to move into the next chapter of life for Gemini ALPA members.

In December 2005, I was elected, in general elections, to be installed as the new captain representative and as chairman of the Gemini MEC. I was clear during the process that I would accept nominations without campaigning and would accept whatever position the general membership felt I was best suited to fulfill. Now that I've been elected and installed, I intend to work hard to move our Council forward. I feel the best way to make progress is to have goals that are achievable.

Here are my goals: "Return to the basics—communicate; through communication, speak with one voice—unify; and finally as we begin to talk, and once we speak as one, we must all work together—participate." If I can motivate flightcrew members to do these three things—communicate, unify, participate—we will begin to feel the strength that people feel when they work as a team.

ALPA provides many means to enhance communica-



MAIN PHOTO: A Gemini DC-10-30F unloads at the FedEx cargo terminal at Toronto Pearson International Airport after arriving from Memphis.
ABOVE: Capt. Mike Belcher confers with P/F/E Doris Leichtamer after landing in Toronto.



ABOVE: Capt. Robert Maynard confers with loadmaster Tony Chrisis in an MD-11 cockpit. RIGHT: F/O Kevin Keener preflights an MD-11 in the pouring rain before a flight to Stuttgart, Germany, with cargo for Air Canada.

tions. The staff can help us with oral messages and written communications. ALPA has tools that are helpful in getting information to members in an effective, timely manner. We can help ourselves by taking every initiative to communicate via the Internet, telephones, face-to-face meetings, and sharing any written communications we receive. For Council groups as small as ours, other means are available to open lines of communication, too. An MEC officer can call each of his council members to discuss his or her thoughts, ideas, and feelings. I will call every member of my Council and, as part of that call, take time to



encourage and listen to suggestions that we can use to improve communications as well as hear about other areas needing attention. Communication is the first step to unity and the cornerstone for a council.

With open lines of communications and understanding, we then begin to speak with one voice. A unified Council places the known interests of its members first and foremost. Being unified makes decision-making easier and helps guarantee that the efforts of the elected officers and volunteers are guided in the direction best suited for the Council at large. Being unified makes success easier and mitigates somewhat the pain if we fail in some area. Unity is my second important task to achieve. Council members who are unified will likely be more willing to roll up their sleeves and pitch in when asked to do so.

Participation is our third important issue. If work needs to be done, one or two members can do it. But if 8 or 10 members roll up their sleeves and help to accomplish a task, it will be completed in less time with greater ease and success. Many don't volunteer to help get the job done because they don't know what needs to be done. Communication will correct that part of participation. Some fail to help because they don't want to do it alone. Unification will solve a lack of participation.

If we communicate, unify, and finally participate, far more will be accomplished with ease, and everybody will enjoy the fruits of labor. 🌀

Gemini Crewmember Group At a Glance

Number of flightcrew members: 253

Joined ALPA: March 2002

Operation: Gemini Air Cargo provides aircraft, crew, maintenance, and insurance (ACMI) for customers worldwide. Founded in 1995 to support airline and integrator needs for outsourced airlift in the growing ACMI and subservice arena, the company today serves a high-profile customer base.

Headquarters: Dulles, Va.

Pilot bases: Gemini Air Cargo flightcrew crewmembers are home-based and domiciled at 11 major airports across the United States.

Equipment: MD-11F and DC-10-30F freighters