

Independence Plus

By Capt. Terry Fenningham (Independence Air)

► My aviation career started with my first flying lesson in 1970 and continued in the U.S. Navy, flying E-2s. My union career started when I became a member of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) in 1978. That career ended abruptly in an attempt to achieve a contract with work rules that addressed the stress level of the job. President Reagan fired me, and thousands of others, for practicing self-help by striking. Although I certainly paid the price for belonging to my union, I never regretted my decision to withhold my services, because we were right.

Wanting to stay in aviation, I flew for several Part 135 operators over the next several years, each run more haphazardly and unsafely than the next. I became an ALPA member in 1989, as a first officer for Pocono Airlines flying a Metro III. I remember filling out the membership application to become an ALPA member. I was hoping things would turn out better with ALPA. I knew managements needed to be accountable for safe operation of the airline, which is what ALPA is all about. We had no labor problems at Pocono. But I didn't know at the time that we were operating only until management found a buyer for the airline's Kennedy gates, which they sold a year later, and I was out of a job again.

In 1990, I was hired by West Air, a United Express airline, as a first officer in the EMB-120. My experience with ALPA was still minimal, but I was beginning to see how important a union is to an airline pilot. In 1991, West Air sold its East Coast operations to a newly formed company, Atlantic Coast Airlines. I thought that the chance to be part of a new airline would be exciting, and as the company grew, I also began to realize the importance of seniority.

Our union clearly needed volun-

teers, so I decided to offer my services to the MEC ATC Committee. I quickly learned how important it was to work under specific negotiated work rules and pay rates—the collective bargaining agreement. And by working to support ALPA's motto, Schedule with

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Safety, I knew that I was part of a union that was keeping an eye out not just for me, but also for every other pilot throughout North America.

I've had the pleasure of serving on many ALPA volunteer committees throughout my aviation career. From status representative to Negotiating Committee chairman, I was able to work with many great and professional pilots at Atlantic Coast and Independence Air. I've also been able to serve pilots on a national level. I take pride in having worked with pilots from different ALPA pilot groups as a Board of Directors member and on committees that ranged from the Hearing and Appeals Board to the Election and Ballot Committee.

But my time spent working with the Special Representational Structure

Review Committee (SRSRC) gave me the most pleasure, as we tried to restructure the ALPA local council design to represent all pilots equally.

On January 5, my airline closed its doors. I don't want to point fingers and place blame as to why our business model didn't work. What would that accomplish? But what was amazing to me was that I was part of a professional group of pilots who kept their heads up until the very end. Without a doubt, all our pilots were hoping that we would exit bankruptcy and that we would continue to fly for Independence Air. But even after we received our displacement letters, all of our pilots flew in the same professional and courteous way that we had always operated, right up until our last flight landed.

Finally, I would like to thank, on behalf of my Independence brothers and sisters, all the ALPA staff I've had the privilege of working with for the last 17 years. I've witnessed firsthand why they are the envy of the industry. If I was at a grievance hearing or negotiating session, or in the MEC office, I was always treated with respect and dignity and given the utmost support. Immediately after our airline shut down, ALPA staff members' work in setting up the career workshop and job fair was first class. I know that all the pilots who attended are enormously grateful.

I'd also like to thank all the pilots who opened up their doors to get all our commuting pilots home, and to attend the career and job fairs.

Now we all must move on. My eyes will always water when I think of all the great times I had at Atlantic Coast and Independence.

I know that ALPA will continue leading the industry to make it as safe and respectable as possible. ALPA will continue the fight for fair wages and work rules. 🌐

With Much Gratitude

ALPA would like to thank the following companies for attending the career and job fair immediately after the Independence Air shutdown:

Air, Inc.	Executive
Air Wisconsin	Fliteways
American	Flexjet
Eagle	Morgan Stanley
Direct Personnel	Netjets
International	Pinnacle