

A view of Wittman Regional Airport's Boeing Plaza, looking east from the EAA Four Corners area.



ALPA'S PRESENCE AT THIS YEAR'S OSHKOSH:

A REFLECTION OF THE MANY WAYS MEMBERS CHOSE TO PARTICIPATE

By John Perkinson, Senior Staff Writer

ALPA pilots were front and center at the summer's EAA AirVenture Oshkosh, helping to promote the wonders of flight to this year's nearly 677,000 attendees, another record turnout for the Experimental Aircraft Association's annual fly-in convention and air show. Amid the throngs of aviation enthusiasts, ALPA members could be seen working in the Association's booth, sharing information, and answering

questions from the hundreds of daily visitors.

But ALPA's outreach didn't stop there. Numerous members performed in air shows, exhibited historic and unique aircraft, engaged with aviation industry partners, and promoted a host of other air transportation organizations. Many more roamed the Wittman Regional Airport grounds with family and friends, simply enjoying what's touted as the



Above: Capt. Tyler Hawkins, ALPA's vice president-administration/secretary, is a guest on EAA Radio's *Squawk 1200* program.

Below: From left, F/O Michelle Bigham (Delta) and Flight Attendant Monica Benjamin (Delta) are among the thousands who posed for this year's WomenVenture group photo.



F/O Tim Everets (Air Canada), his pilot group's executive administrator, staffs the Association's booth.

“world’s greatest aviation celebration.”

The 70th anniversary of EAA AirVenture drew flying devotees from 93 countries in addition to the United States. For the last 10 days of July, Wittman boasted “the world’s busiest control tower” as it managed an average of 148 takeoffs and landings per hour while the airport was open.

However, for all the attention drawn to the 10,000 aircraft that touched down at the airport and the 3,365 show planes featured that week, seasoned EAA AirVenture attendees understand that “Oshkosh,” as the air show is known, is as much about the pilots as the aircraft they fly. Like ALPA, one of EAA’s primary directives is to increase aviator numbers by growing interest and participation in flying, the impetus behind many of the week’s attractions and happenings.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

For the last few years, ALPA has selected a particular outdoor booth on the edge of the airfield’s centrally located Boeing Plaza for its visibility and exposure to pedestrian traffic. The facility served several purposes this year, including as a point of contact for the Association.

Dozens of ALPA volunteers staffed the booth’s meet-and-greet area—pilots like Oshkosh regular F/O Susan Bailey-Schmidt (Delta) and ALPA booth newcomer F/O Tim Everets (Air Canada), the executive administrator of one of ALPA’s newest pilot groups.

Across from the pilot desk, a banner advertised Operation BackPack4Kids, a FedEx Express pilots-supported charity that provides backpacks filled with essentials to children affected by major crises around the globe. Nearby, two Red-



This year’s EAA AirVenture gave special recognition to the Vought F4U Corsair, which saw service in World War II and the Korean War. Two are seen taxiing along the Wittman flight line.

bird Jay Velocity flight simulators were available for aspiring pilots to test their flying skills.

On the west end of the structure, an adjoining theater enabled ALPA to conduct daily Professional Development Group (PDG) presentations for those interested in learning more about the airline piloting profession, while also offering a venue where Association members and their families could take a break from the hot summer sun and enjoy ALPA’s popular nightly dinners.

The Association participates at AirVenture, in part, in support of ALPA’s strategic plan, which directs the union’s leaders “to promote the profession and inspire the next generation of aviators.” The event has proven to be ideal for this purpose, as scores of young people and their parents, as well as others interested in the profession, continue to flock to ALPA’s location to seek advice from current airline pilots. With a renewed interest in the piloting profession, aviation’s extraordinary safety record, and recent labor contract improvements highlighted in the news, attendees wanted to know more about becoming an airline pilot,



From left, F/O Chris Van Nostrand (Delta) and F/O Mike Mainiero (Kalitta Air) answer questions about the B-25J *Miss Mitchell*, which flies as part of the Minnesota Wing of the Commemorative Air Force.

what it entails, and the best pathways to launch a career.

The facility also provided the Association with a prime spot to reconnect with current and retired airline pilots, and to further promote member engagement—another strategic charge.

And with more than 1,400 forums, workshops, and presentations scheduled at this year’s event, it was imperative that ALPA effectively connect with all those

interested in learning more about what the Association has to offer.

The union posted a dedicated ALPA Oshkosh website to serve as a clearinghouse of information for both members and the public. ALPA also listed presentation notices in *EAA AirVenture Today* newspapers and on EAA's online forums and workshops pages and advertised in the air show's official visitors' guide.

In addition, ALPA employed a new strategy, ensuring that those within a half-mile radius of Boeing Plaza received directional cues to the Association's booth via social media advertisements. ALPA implemented a full array of outreach tools to make its whereabouts known.

COMMUNICATING ALPA'S MESSAGE

Daily presentations featured PDG members communicating details about different aspects of the airline piloting profession. In the theater, F/O Justin Dahan (FedEx Express), ALPA's Education Committee chair, kicked off morning sessions with a presentation titled "A Day in the Life of an Airline Pilot," examining what to expect when flying the line.

F/O Camila Turrieta (JetBlue), ALPA's Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion (DEBI) Committee chair, and Capt. Hans Reigle (United), a DEBI Committee member, discussed "Landing an Aviation Scholarship" to hundreds of attendees throughout the week.

The Association continues to draw new members from the military. To assist these service members and explain the transition process, Capt. Kandy Bernskoetter (FedEx Express), ALPA's Membership Committee chair, presented "Military Vets to Airline Jets—Funding Your Airline Career." F/O Mark Lockwood, the Association's Leadership Committee chair (Delta), gave the final presentation, "Pathways to the Airlines/Time-Building Opportunities."

To reach a broader audience at Oshkosh, two of ALPA's pilot leaders took to the airwaves, participating in EAA Radio interviews. On Tuesday afternoon, while many were beginning to gather along the flight line for the afternoon air show, Capt. Tyler Hawkins, the union's vice president—administration/secretary, talked with announcers Fareed Guyot and Paul Preidecker as part of the daily *Squawk 1200* program.

Hawkins highlighted the Association's ongoing efforts to promote the profes-

sion to the next generation of airline pilots. "We're excited to be here. AirVenture is a great opportunity to meet with current members while cultivating new ones," he said. "There's a lot of interest in being a pilot these days."

Two days later, during the same program, Dahan highlighted the work of ALPA's Aviation Collegiate Education (ACE) Clubs at colleges and universities with accredited aviation-degree programs and the resources available on the Association's clearedtodream.org website. He also discussed the many other outreach efforts the union employs to encourage and aid those interested in becoming airline pilots, particularly those typically underrepresented in the piloting profession.

Listeners could hear the two programs on local stations 96.5 FM and 1210 AM, online, and via airfield loudspeakers.

ALPA also conducted EAA Radio interviews, as longtime host Capt. Jeff Montgomery (United), aka "J Mont G," broadcasted the *On the Fly* program. He spoke with a variety of aviation personalities live from various locations around the Wittman grounds.

To further promote the union's visibility this year, the Association cosponsored the EAA Runway 5K held Saturday morning on the airport tarmac. Runners included Lockwood, who was cheered on by several of his PDG peers.

SEEING STARS

One of the easiest places to spot ALPA pilots was in the skies during the event's

afternoon and evening air shows. A number of Association members entertained Oshkosh guests with feats of aerobatic mastery, synchronized flight formations, and demonstrations of various aircraft capabilities.

Among AirVenture's headliners was Capt. William "Skip" Stewart (FedEx Express), an Oshkosh regular who wowed the crowd flying his Pitts S-2S *Prometheus* (see "Our Stories" in the September 2018 issue). The modified biplane can climb 4,000 feet per minute and is capable of +12 and -7 Gs, more than twice the G limit of the aircraft's stock variant.

With more than 32 years of air show experience and more than 1,400 performances, Capt. Randy Ball (Air Wisconsin) was also a featured performer (see "Our Stories" in the September 2022 issue). He conducted low-level flybys and stunning aerobatics in his MiG-17.

Another fan favorite is the Aero-shell Aerobatic Team, which has been performing tight-formation aerial maneuvers for more than 25 years in T-6 Texans. Flying the No. 4 aircraft in the slot position was Capt. Jimmy Fordham (Delta, Ret.), who prior to his airline retirement logged 20,000 hours of flight time. He joined the team in 2010 as the spare pilot, becoming a member of the regular lineup during the 2018 season.

F/O Scott "Scooter" Yoak (Delta) performed solo in his North American P-51 Mustang *Quick Silver* on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday (see page 33). The B-767 pilot holds a surface level aerobatic waiver for his Mustang, which is



During Leadership Committee chair F/O Mark Lockwood's (Delta) Friday presentation, other ALPA members and staff present him with a commemorative t-shirt to show their support for his participation in EAA's Saturday Runway 5K.



Capt. Linda Sollars (JetBlue) proudly stands by her Sling HW, the first production-built High Wing in the world, which she purchased from the Sling Factory in South Africa.



From left, Capt. Bill Sleeper (United, Ret.) and Capt. Gary Baker (United, Ret.) on the flight deck of a Ford Trimotor. The two provided rides to paying customers.



Capt. Chris Reeves (Spirit) after an air show briefing. A member of the Wisconsin National Guard, Reeves later took part in a demonstration of the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter.



Ander Turueno Garcia, an Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University junior and an ALPA ACE Club officer, works his school's outdoor booth.

required for maneuvers like the inverted ribbon cut. In this tactical move, Yoak inverts the aircraft 180 degrees, flying it directly at a colorful ribbon and cutting it with the airplane's propeller.

IN THE SKIES AND ON THE GROUND

Other ALPA members flying for units like the Commemorative Air Force—organizations that preserve and exhibit historic aircraft—parked their airplanes in the Warbird section at the north end of Wittman. These pilots answered questions about aircraft performance and history when they weren't called upon to engage in both small- and large-scale formation

flyovers and simulated missions.

Some of this year's P-51 Mustang flyers included airline pilots like Capt. Jeff Linebaugh (FedEx Express), Capt. Larry Lumpkin (United, Ret.) (see "Our Stories" in the October 2016 issue), Capt. Ray Fowler (Delta), F/O Melisa Foures (Delta), and F/O Joe Shetterly (Delta).

Several Mustang pilots like Yoak and Capt. Stuart Milson (FedEx Express), who also serves as chief pilot for the Cavanaugh Flight Museum in Addison, Tex., were asked to fly multiple aircraft types. They and others also flew the Vought F4U Corsair, which was given special recognition this year for its featured role

in the 2022 movie *Devotion*.

Meanwhile, F/O Chris Van Nostrand (Delta) and Capt. Mike Mainiero (Kalitta Air) staffed the North American B-25J *Miss Mitchell*, also parked in the Warbirds section. *Miss Mitchell*, which has been refurbished, served during World War II in the 57th Bomber Wing of the 12th Air Force, flying over North Africa and Italy. This specific aircraft has the unique distinction of operating 130 missions during the war with no crew fatalities.

Next to *Miss Mitchell*, Capt. Val Scott (United, Ret.) (see "Our Stories" in the August 2017 issue) answered questions about the B-25J-30-NC *Devil Dog*. She flew the vintage bomber from its home in Georgetown, Tex., to Oshkosh. Scott also staffed the International Society of Women Airline Pilots (ISA+21) booth, talking about her extensive experience on the airline flight deck to young aspiring airline pilots.

Another antique aircraft appearing in afternoon formations was a 1960s-era Nanchang CJ-6, a Chinese basic military trainer. Capt. Jeremy Keyes (Kalitta Air), his pilot group's Master Executive Council chair, flew the historic transport previously operated by the People's Liberation Army Air Force.

However, not all air show flyers operated fixed-wing aircraft. Capt. Chris Reeves (Spirit), who also serves as a chief warrant officer III for the 1st Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment of the Wisconsin National Guard, took part in a Friday demonstration of his unit's UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. In addition, Kevin Psutka, a safety and security representative in ALPA's Engineering & Air Safety Department, flew a Bell OH-58 Kiowa to the show, a helicopter he previously flew as a member of the Canadian Forces Reserve, and helped display it in the Warbirds area in honor of military veterans.

EXPERIENCING HISTORY

In addition to witnessing aviation history, Oshkosh attendees were also encouraged to experience it. AirVenture employed several Ford Trimotors painted in vintage airline livery, which aircraft enthusiasts could ride for a fee. The "Tin Goose," as it's affectionately known, was introduced in the mid-1920s and could carry eight to nine passengers. Capt. Bill Sleeper (United, Ret.), Capt. Gary Baker (United, Ret.), and Capt. Bill Thacker (United, Ret.) were among the flight crews offering daily rides.

EAA also coordinated flights on the North American B-25 Mitchell *Berlin Express* from nearby Appleton International Airport, offering passengers an 18-minute flight as well as a unique perspective of Wittman airfield. F/O Julie Cruze (United), one of the pilots flying the airplane, also gave a Monday presentation in the EAA WomenVenture Forums area titled "Finding a Passion and Keeping the Passion Burning."

In stark contrast, a Delta Air Lines Airbus A350-900 arrived in Boeing Plaza on Tuesday morning, allowing attendees a one-day opportunity to walk through the spacious widebody. Used primarily on international routes, Delta's four-cabin A350s seat more than 300 passengers.

Many of the pilots displaying at AirVenture had fascinating stories to tell about their aircraft. An excellent example was the general aviation Sling HW, parked in the homebuilt section of the airport grounds, and Capt. Linda Sollars (JetBlue) who made history flying it.

Taking delivery of the aircraft at the manufacturer's Johannesburg factory last year, Sollars engaged in a 72-hour journey flying the aircraft from South Africa, crossing the Atlantic Ocean to

display it at Oshkosh. Along the way, she stopped in Angola, Ghana, Cape Verde, and Barbados before reaching the United States. She fueled the airplane in Florida, Alabama, and Kentucky before finally touching down in Wisconsin. Sollars was back this year to display the unique transport and once again recount her adventures.

"What I didn't count on was the impact our journey was going to have on others," Sollars remarked. Referencing last year's trek, she said, "Not till we landed at Oshkosh did I really appreciate how many people were scared for us, followed our every move, and how we inspired people of all ages."

One of the worst accidents in aviation history occurred on March 27, 1977, when two B-747 passenger jets collided on the runway at Tenerife North Airport. Tenerife is the largest of the Canary Islands, located off the coast of Spain.

Capt. Laura Savino, a former United pilot, gave a presentation outlining the details of the disaster, which has had an enduring legacy. This accident shed new light on the importance of standardized phraseology in aircraft radio communications and helped initiate the now commonplace crew resource management procedures.

SUPPORTING OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Numerous ALPA members attended AirVenture in support of other aviation organizations or to participate in recruiting efforts on behalf of their airlines. F/O Liz O'Toole (JetBlue) staffed the National Gay Pilots Association booth in EAA's Aviation Gateway Park. In an adjacent building, F/O Stacey Jackson (WestJet) answered questions from the Women in Aviation International desk, and F/O Maggie Eickhoff (Delta) proudly represented ISA+21.

For the 16th year, this event featured a WomenVenture Day, which took place on Wednesday and kicked off with a special breakfast followed by the annual group photo in Boeing Plaza at 11:00 a.m. Thousands gathered for the shot, including many ALPA members—pilots like F/O Michelle Bigham (Delta)—who made their numbers heard as the photo was snapped. Bigham and her peers spent the remainder of the day involved in activities focused on the importance of recruiting larger numbers of women

to aviation careers.


Other Association members representing aviation industry organizations included Capt. Geoff Weck (United, Ret.) who worked the Soaring Society of America booth, an umbrella organization representing glider clubs in the United States.

Back in Aviation Gateway Park, Capt. Jason Kinnaird (Frontier) talked to guests about the merits of flying for his airline. In the same hangar, F/O Ally Olson (Endeavor Air) and F/O Alex Jones (Endeavor Air) reminded potential pilot candidates that their carrier is a wholly owned subsidiary and has a strong flow-through arrangement with Delta Air Lines.

Capt. Maria Zarka (Hawaiian) and F/O Noelle Boney (Hawaiian) shared their Pacific Ocean flying encounters, and F/O Matt McGuire (PSA) described what it's like to be an American Eagle pilot. In addition, F/O Ryan Knostman (Envoy Air) and F/O Adam Shaffer (Envoy Air) spoke to Oshkosh attendees regarding what it's like flying the Embraer E175.

Ander Turueno Garcia, an Embry-Riddle college junior and an officer of the school's ALPA-sponsored ACE Club who staffed his university's booth, best represented why ALPA takes part in EAA's AirVenture. His regular appearance at the Association's booth, positive attitude, and excitement about a future career in aviation were more than evident.

So many ALPA pilots were present at this year's AirVenture, reflecting their connection to and engagement with the larger aviation community while enjoying this world-renowned celebration that recognizes the airplanes and pilots who help connect the world and make flying the safest form of transportation.

And the Association will continue to pursue opportunities like Oshkosh to seek out individuals—like Garcia—who are fundamental to maintaining air transportation's legacy and keeping the pipeline of available airline pilot candidates going strong. 

EAA AIRVENTURE OSHKOSH

Learn more about EAA AirVenture Oshkosh at eaa.org/en/airventure.