



Cabin Confab

Flight attendants learn safety ropes at conference

by Matt Thurber

If attendance numbers and enthusiasm of those who flocked to San Diego in mid-June for the 16th NBAA Flight Attendants/Flight Technicians conference are any indication of the health of business aviation, then this segment is on the upswing. This year, 188 people attended, up substantially from last year's 138, and a record number of attendees and exhibitors were on hand to network and learn about safety and service and best practices. Many attendees reported plenty of work, including for contract flight attendants, who were walloped by the recession and its slow-growth aftermath. That flight attendants are busy underscores the strength in the large-cabin jet market, too.

"You are a critical part of a team that makes a flight mission possible," said Steve Brown, NBAA senior vice president of operations and administration. "Our industry is changing. There are new markets in far-flung corners of the world and [growing] demands for safety and security. All of our public perception begins with safety," he noted, and flight attendants and technicians are an important part of spreading the word about business aviation's efficiency, safety, security and environmental efforts.

The conference was launched with an inspiring keynote speech by Pat

Johns, who has run the five-day, 100-mile Himalayan 100 race an astonishing five times. Johns's description of the race and his amazing photos underscored his advice to the conference attendees, which included his "5 Cs pentagon of change." One of those—leaving your comfort zone—clearly resonated, given the requirement for flight attendants to learn new safety and service skills and to figure out how to deal with complex international travel constraints.

Flight attendants who face drug-and-alcohol problems now have a helping hand, through the new Flight Attendant Drug and Alcohol Program (Fadap), which is "dedicated to educating the aviation industry on alcohol and drug abuse." US Airways flight attendant Deborah McCormick explained how Fadap provides a resource both for flight attendants with drug-and-alcohol-abuse problems and for those seeking help with colleagues who are facing their own problems. Fadap is holding its first annual conference August 16 to 18 in Baltimore, Md. For more information, see www.fadap.org.

Passenger Involvement

Flight attendant Amy Nelson, who is also chair of the NBAA safety and training subcommittee, delivered a presentation on the importance of how educating business jet passengers enhances safety. Nelson's presentation highlights the lack of

cabin safety knowledge among some aircraft buyers, especially those new to private aviation. "When are the clients educated on the regulations?" she asked. It isn't acceptable for unsafe practices to occur just because owners like to do things their way," she added.

Nelson gave examples of unsafe cabins, including seat-beds set up before takeoff and blocking emergency exits, large fax machines sitting on a table next to the emergency exit and carry-on bags stashed around the cabin.

A good time to educate owners is during a company safety standdown. Other opportunities develop, such as asking regular passengers to open the cabin door after landing. "Show them stuff a little at a time," she recommended. "And use their children in the training. There are different opportunities to get them involved in the process."

The best part of the conference is the sharing that takes place between experienced flight attendants and technicians, attendees who are looking to break into the business and pilots who participate in support of their colleagues and

to learn more about cabin safety and service. A great example of this sharing and mutual admiration was the Captain's Roundtable, featuring Home Depot captain Jennifer Bartram; David Hinckley, a captain from Flexjet; and MGM Resorts captain Robert Connioto. The three captains offered tips on their operations' cabin safety best practices and the importance of flight attendants. "At Flexjet," said Hinckley, "flight attendants are a vital bridge. A trained Flexjet flight attendant adds to the team concept. And they catch problems before they become an emergency."

Added Connioto: "You are all very valued and welcomed members of the flight team and we don't ever say it, but we appreciate what you do."

Bartram has found that many of her company's travelers are business jet frequent fliers and are comfortable and familiar with the airplanes. But when new passengers fly, she tries to make sure that a flight attendant is on the

trip to help them learn about cabin safety.

An especially valuable series of sessions was held on the last day of the conference, the Minute Clinics, where attendees rotate among four fast-paced, 15-minute presentations on professional table settings, ethnic cuisines, food safety and flight attendant software programs and mobile apps.

Jean Dible's clinic on food safety captured the attention of a rapt audience, highlighting how easy it is for harmful bacteria to grow. This information was brought home during the final day's session on real-life flight attendant experiences, by flight attendant Will Macca. His recounting of a nearly fatal suspected food sabotage experience forever burned the words "campylobacter jejuni" into the audience's brains. One of the doctors who treated Macca later told him that it was impossible for him to have survived having eaten food containing that much of the bacteria, which is found in animal feces.

Kendylle Wessell, who works for charter provider North Atlantic Air, Beverly, Mass., offered a tale of an emergency landing in the Turks and Caicos due to smoke, during a trip from Antigua to Wilmington, Del. The smoke was caused by a short-circuit in the jet's water system. Wessell attributed her calmness during the emergency—her first ever—to her training. "I didn't have a choice," she said. "Something took over my body and made me do what I did."

Flight attendant Paul Aston also experienced a smoke emergency during a departure from London Luton Airport last December. The smoke was caused by too much de-icing fluid in the wrong place. Aston managed to keep the passengers under control, including one panicky male who tried to enter the cockpit during the emergency, who finally sat down, saying over and over, "We're going to [expletive] die." After the jet landed safely, the passengers showered Aston with grateful hugs and told him that no matter how they got home, he was going to be flying with them. "What if there hadn't been a flight attendant on board?" he asked himself afterward. "I kept hearing [well known flight attendant trainer] Susan Friedenberg's voice: 'This is why we need trained flight attendants in the cabin.'" □



Pat Johns



Kendylle Wessell



Jennifer Bartram



Robert Connioto



David Hinckley

Air-Care International's New Facts Fire Trainer

Air-Care International's Facts training division has added a new simulator to its stable of cabin safety training devices, an in-flight fire trainer. The mobile unit features a replica of a business jet cabin interior, made of metal so it won't burn, with an enclosed lavatory, galley and cabin divan seating area. Each area is fed by vegetable-oil smoke and gas-fired flames controlled by the instructor; the student has to detect and put out the fires using compressed-air-driven, water-filled extinguishers. The fire trainer was developed so that students could get more realistic practice for smoke emergencies and fire-handling, instead of the typical blasting of the barbecue fire. Students also get to practice using smoke hoods, gloves, helmets and bunker jackets. Facts has placed the fire trainer at its Long Beach, Calif., training center and plans to add two more next year, in Morristown, N.J., and Dallas. —M.T.

Flight Attendants Are Safety Specialists

"The number-one priority is being safety specialists," said Dodie Thomas, who works for Altria Client Services and was chosen as vice chairwoman of the NBAA Flight Attendants Committee. Mary Ann Fash became chairwoman of the committee, taking over from Scott Arnold. "We've come a long way from Emily Post [etiquette lessons]," Thomas added. "If you're just a cabin server, you're not going to be able to save your own life." Thomas was ecstatic about the high number of attendees at this year's conference and also the 50 people who showed up for the first-timers get-together. "There are quite a few new to the business," she said. "People have lost jobs, but it's getting better. There are a lot of core people here. We love what we do, and we're passionate about it." —M.T.

Facts about Dry Ice

A contingent of U.S. Air Force flight attendants participated in this year's NBAA Flight Attendants/Flight Technicians conference, not just to learn from their peers but to share their own experiences using dry ice as a cooling medium to keep food safe on long trips. It turns out that a sufficient quantity of dry ice allows for weeks of operation and proper food storage. There are important safety considerations when using dry ice. Storage containers that can hold dry ice without becoming brittle and cracking are available. Dry ice vapors are pure CO₂, so proper venting is critical. And protective gloves must be used when handling dry ice. The Air Force team's presentation on safe dry ice handling is available at: www.nbaa.org/events/a-ft/2011/presentations. —M.T.