

## Hotel Updates



*Jay Lyle (PIT)*  
Chairman, Crew Accommodations Committee

The year 2002 is off and running but, unfortunately, your committee is not—at least not yet. I was hoping that management would also be ready to get back to work on fixing hotel problems, but instead of running at a brisk pace, we are off the starting line at a walking pace. There have been some completed site inspections and decisions, but still much more needs to be accomplished.

To begin with, changes are coming to our crew bases, and I've asked the current committee members to check with me on where they will be based and their interest in continuing on the Crew Accommodations Committee. I suspect by the time I write the next article, I'll have a very good idea of who is still willing to serve and the areas in which we will need help.

I would ask everyone to give some thought to helping out your union at some time in your career. The most important thing about getting involved is to volunteer for something that you find interesting. Since ALPA is based on volunteer work, it is important to choose an area that is personally of some interest to you in order to be effective and remain interested. I appreciate all the time and effort each member has given to this committee over the years. I can't do it alone and wouldn't want to try. So please give some thought to giving any committee chairman a call and offering your services for a year or two. I know that as we change bases, airplanes, and seats (along with the needs of your growing families), often a commitment of much longer is not feasible.

We held a quarterly meeting with the Travel Services Department, AFA, and Operations Crew Support at the ALPA office on December 10. Some highlights were meeting the new AFA hotel chairperson, as the former chairman had

taken a leave of absence and therefore declined to run again for office. We also learned that the VP of Purchasing, Tom Fink, had resigned. The Travel Services Department is now reporting to US Airways CFO Tom Mutryn until a replacement is hired. We discussed the new problem some crews had when certain hotels were not accepting unscheduled stays without first receiving a fax from the Company. The reason for this is two-fold: First, in cities where we use multiple hotels, crews sometimes try to change the hotel (on their own) from the scheduled hotel to one they like better. A few of the hotels have not been paid for accepting an unscheduled crew for this reason. Adding to this (and this should be just about over) is if the trip repair team did not follow through by making sure hotel reservations for crews were made after the trip was changed. This was due largely to the limited flying out of DCA and the elimination of some cities from mainline service.

Whenever your trip has been changed, it is always a very good idea to get relevant information from the Scheduling Department. Such information should include who Scheduling talked to at the hotel when they made the reservation, the person in the Scheduling Department who made the reservation and what time it was done. (This information should all be in the scheduler's computer.) Having this information is very helpful if you arrive at a hotel and they claim that there is no reservation for you. If the scheduler is unable to provide you with the information, I recommend being put on hold while they call the hotel to reconfirm your rooms.

The Company will also see a large cost-savings with the reduction in overnights due to the reduction in capacity. In September 2001,

*“ We discussed the new problem some crews had when certain hotels were not accepting unscheduled stays without first receiving a fax from the Company. ”*

*“ The cancellation program is a good way to save costs and may be accomplished if you do not plan to use your room on a scheduled overnight. ”*

we were scheduled to have 92,167 overnight rooms. In January 2002, that number dropped to 64,290—a difference of 27,877 rooms per month.

There was another discussion concerning the room cancellation program. Management feels that crewmembers are not using the program as much as it could be used. The cancellation program is a good way to save costs and may be accomplished if you do not plan to use your room on a scheduled overnight. There is an 800 number provided, which crewmembers may use for this purpose, but you must call by 3 p.m. EST to cancel a room. Please remember canceling or not canceling a room has no bearing on an OIJ claim. The decision to cancel a room is strictly voluntary.

**Hotel changes**

Beginning in January, a short overnight hotel was added at Ft. Myers (RSW), as the Homewood Suites has had difficulty handling the occupancy increase during the season. Over the last two years, many crews have been relocated to other hotels on short notice. Also, the drive to the Homewood Suites can be a bit long, especially on a minimum rest overnight. We searched the area around the airport and found

that there are no full-service hotels closer to the airport than the Holiday Inn Select (which is right next to the Homewood). The same company owns both hotels, and the Holiday Inn showed no interest in acquiring our short overnights. Had we made this change, it really wouldn't have solved the driving-time issue for the shortest overnights. Less than halfway to the Homewood Suites is a cluster of limited service hotels. We contacted them and received a good response from all. We eliminated two right away because they were both 100 percent nonsmoking. (Yes, we reserve all nonsmoking rooms at our hotels, but felt that not being able to offer our smokers the ability to have smoking rooms was too much of an inconvenience and could cause problems for everyone.)

That left us with two fairly good choices, and from those, we chose the Best Western for its location. The Best Western offers a continental breakfast, and they have a couple of restaurants very close by. (Just in front is a Woody's Barbeque. They offer all three meals and deliver to the hotel if you want. The walk is about 100 yards.) There is also an Italian restaurant being built that should be open by now. I'm not sure if they will offer breakfast, but they will have dinner and also deliver to the hotel. (The walk

***Disapproval List***

- LAX**—Not all of the hotels need to be replaced but the city needs to have an overhaul. We are in the final stages of making some changes that should lead to improvements.
- CHS long**—This is another one of our long overnight location problems. We are trying to schedule an inspection for this site.
- IAH**—We need a long overnight for this city and are in the process of gathering information for good long overnight locations.
- PNS**—We heard from Captain Gibson's office on the grievance regarding this city. It was denied and is being appealed to the system board.

***Watch List***

- BNA long**—The location of the hotel is poor. The long overnights are becoming steady, so we will again push for a site inspection.
- DFW long**—The location of the hotel is OK for short overnights but not for long overnights. The long overnights are sporadic at this time, but we will watch to see if we have steady long overnights again.
- MSY**—Both long and short hotels need to be relocated. Long overnights have dropped off, and the short hotel needs to be relocated closer to the airport.

will be just a bit farther than Woody's.) The Italian restaurant is owned by the same folks who own Taste of New York in the Bell Tower Shops near the Homewood. We expect the quality of the food to be similar to what is experienced there. The Best Western is very anxious to work with us and would like any feedback we can give them. When I stayed there, I thought the morning breakfast could use some more selections, and they promised to look into it. There should be a waffle iron now, along with yogurt, and some other forms of protein instead of just sweet rolls. Please feel free to pass along some suggestions to the front desk and your committee concerning this new hotel. I would like to hear your suggestions just to make sure the front desk is passing along our concerns. I believe the shortened drive time will be a benefit, especially to the shortest overnights, and I don't think we will be giving up much quality. Long overnights will still be located at the Homewood Suites.

The inspection trip for LAX overnight hotels finally occurred. Currently, we are awaiting a preliminary recommendation from some higher-ups in the Purchasing Department. We want to see some changes in the hotels used in LAX, and our reasons are listed in the report. Your committee and the AFA's crew accommodations committee have expressed concern about the hotels under review, and that has not changed over time. Having things take so long is very frustrating for everyone involved—your committee, those flying the trips, and the hotels bidding on the business. As each month goes by, the hotels that want to acquire our business have again to rearrange what they can, while accepting in-advance bookings as they try to save space for our crews if a decision is actually made. I believe our management sometimes forgets that the hotel managers are running a business, and they need answers also so that they can run their business in a profitable manner. The longer the process takes, and as the word gets out that US Airways will not make timely decisions, the fewer hotels will bid on the business.

In many high-cost cities, the Travel Services Department has to make presentations to the Purchasing Department regarding the reasons why they wish to use a certain hotel, the costs involved, and a list of viable choices. Since many times these managers have to sign off on the contract, they are given a change in order to review the decisions made by the Travel Services Department. One big problem I have with

this system is that the people making the decisions often never see the hotels we are choosing. Therefore, I am not sure how well informed they are by simply reading the numbers from a written report. We will have another opportunity to make our case if the recommendations come down differently from what we deem appropriate for both crews and company. In order to have acceptable customer service, rested flight crews, and cost-effective hotels, we need to have both parties taken into account. Often the lowest-priced accommodations are counterproductive if all issues (location, service, and convenience) cannot be met. Since there is a quarterly meeting scheduled with our management in February, hopefully we can get some decisions made on LAX.

Another city where very slow progress is being made is Charleston (CHS). We had an inspection trip scheduled for September 12 that never happened. After the quarterly meeting in December, I thought we would be able to set up a trip for late January. Well, that has not happened, and only a few phone calls by our management have been made to hotels in CHS to find out who is still interested in talking to us about housing our crews for long overnights. I know the Radisson Hotel we currently use has taken a few steps to try to improve the conditions for our long overnights. The hotel now runs a shuttle to town for us at \$5 per person. It is done at scheduled times, which is better than nothing, and it's much better than using a taxi. The overall problem is that the hotel's location is not suitable for continued long overnights. When we only had long overnights once or twice a month, it was okay, because with such limited traffic, you couldn't find a good hotel that was interested in our business. Also, going out on the open market and trying to find a long hotel every now and again is very time-consuming, and you're never sure what availability you will find. That is why we never pushed for a long overnight hotel in this city and in a few others until there was enough business to sustain a second hotel. The other city with slow progress is Houston, where we also have a large enough number of overnights to warrant a second hotel. A Crew Accommodations Committee member has bid the overnights in Houston so that he can do some scouting for us to try to locate a better area for our long overnights. Both of these cities will be on the top of the list for discussion at the quarterly meeting.

In Ft. Lauderdale (FLL), we have made a change. Management had been very slow to

*“ Often the lowest-priced accommodations are counterproductive if all issues (location, service, and convenience) cannot be met. ”*

*“ A city where progress has been made is St. Lucia. ”*

review the FLL market, and I believe they were pushed a bit by the DoubleTree Hotel, which wanted to keep our business. We wanted to continue staying there as well, but our management would only tell the DoubleTree that they wanted to shop the contract. (This had been going on since April 2001.) The DoubleTree told our management that since they couldn't engage them in any type of negotiations since last April, and since we were on a month-to-month contract, our rate would double during February and March. The reason for this is simple: We get a discounted rate from the hotel, which makes sense for the hotel if there is a contract and if we are going to be there during the slower times when the hotel will not be selling out. That way, they can make up for the lost revenue during the hotel's slower times. However, since we didn't have a contract with the DoubleTree, and they didn't have a guarantee that we would be there after the season, the hotel had to protect its interests by charging a higher rate.

The main reason we were unable to come to an agreement with the DoubleTree was price. Being a beachfront hotel, the rates this hotel can command are higher than hotels off the beach. Adding to the problem is that the DoubleTree is a relatively small hotel at 238 rooms. On the site inspection, there were only two other beachfront hotels willing to bid on the business at anywhere near the rate the DoubleTree was offering. One was the Lauderdale Beach Hotel, which we used last season for overflow crews and which we turned down as a possibility. The other was the Holiday Inn up on Sunrise, which was a bit farther away and didn't have transportation. Adding transportation to their rate put their price above the DoubleTree's price. We were very surprised to learn, though, that the Marriott Hotel and Marina (where we stayed before moving to the DoubleTree) was interested in our business. With the downturn in travel, we are seeing more hotels that are interested in crew business. We were leary of the Marriott bid because in the past they have kicked us out as soon as the business picks up in the city. We decided to take a leap of faith, try the Marriott again, and hope the past events will change Marriott's long-range view of airline crew business. When we used the Marriott before, the crews were quite happy, and we are hoping for the same response this time. The hotel will provide the transportation and currently has two vans. They are offering a 10

percent discount on food and non-alcoholic beverages in the bar and restaurant only, and a 10 percent discount on room service, comp fitness center, local calls, 800 calls, and the daily newspaper. The Marriott also has a schedule set up for transportation to the Marriott Harbor Hotel for access to the beach and entertainment district. In addition to that, the water taxi makes stops at the hotel. Finally, the hotel is offering access to the concierge lounge during its operation times, which are Monday through Thursday, 6:30 a.m.–9:30 p.m.; Friday 6:30 a.m.–9:30 a.m.; and Sunday 5 p.m.–9:30 p.m. (the lounge is closed on Saturday). When the lounge is closed, complementary coffee will be provided through a lobby coffee kiosk. I don't think that this move will cause us to lose any quality in the hotel overnight or options for eating, since there are a number of restaurants along 17th Avenue. However, we do lose easy access to the beach.

A city where progress has been made is St. Lucia (UVF). Our inspector headed to St. Lucia to review what management had turned up with phone calls. I do not want to choose our overnight hotels without someone from the Committee seeing the options. Our management was comfortable enough not to send someone, and we were very pleased that they agreed with our recommendation, even though it was our second choice. Our first choice was not to have crews overnight at this destination and continue to deadhead a crew on each flight. The reason for this was that we only overnight one crew a week since we only serve the market twice a week, on Saturday and Sunday.

This poses some interesting problems. The airport on the north of the island, which handles the commuter aircraft, has been in operation for some time and has quite a bit of development around it. The airport handling the larger jet aircraft is located on the southern portion of the island and is newer, with very little development around it. The drive time from one end of the island to the other can take well over an hour, and you pass through some areas that you really don't want to be driving in. The inspector was chased by panhandlers while driving through one of the cities, and though he was traveling about 20 mph, that didn't deter the panhandlers. We were able to locate a Hilton hotel not as far to the north as most of the development around the northern airport, and it also didn't require the crews to pass through the poorer towns. The big drawback is that the

Hilton is isolated, and you are pretty much stuck there for food and entertainment, but I feel you will find it to be quite nice. The hotel is a gated compound, and the inspector felt quite safe on the grounds of the hotel. The hotel offers some water sports at its private beach and complementary water toys such as rafts. You will also receive a 50 percent discount on the breakfast buffet, and a 15 percent discount for other food service. There are five food outlets on the Hilton grounds, a three-green chipping golf course, health and exercise facilities, tennis courts, a free shuttle around the Hilton resort, and in-room VCRs with movie rentals available. Be aware that transportation to and from the airport is a bit different than what we're used to. Due to government licensing or regulations, the cab companies are only licensed to go from the airport to the hotels, and other companies take you from the hotels to the airport. So we have two different transportation providers, depending on which way you are heading. Transportation to the Hilton is provided through Southern Taxi Association, which has a booth in the airport terminal. Transportation from the Hilton to the airport is provided through South Western Taxi Association, which has a stand at the Hilton. As of this writing, we have only had two crews stay at the Hilton, and I have not received any phone calls.

A site inspection has been conducted on the DCA and IAD facilities since my last article. In both cases, we were able to retain current hotels for the overnights.

As we get going into this year, we will also return to the crew meal and crew room issues. (One issue regarding crew meals that I believe we have fixed: The stations now realize that just because passenger meals have been cut, that has no bearing on crew meals. If you are still running into stations that claim we no longer get crew meals because of the cutback, your committee needs to know about it.)

All that is left is the OF-310 count. The numbers have been way down since September 11, and with all of the other turmoil at US Airways, I can understand why. I would ask all of you to please get back to letting your committee know about problems (and positive events) on the line regarding hotels and transportation companies. We need your comments more than ever, and I'm sure all ALPA committees could again use feedback from you, our bosses—the line pilots.

Thanks to all of you who have continued to let your committee know what you're running into on the line. Keep it up. For those who have not joined in, I once again encourage you to do so.

*Have a good overnight!*



*“ . . . the stations now realize that just because passenger meals have been cut, that has no bearing on crew meals. ”*