SCHEDULERS & DISPATCHERS CONFERENCE REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

News / Business aviation, Events / Festivals

Not even the looming threat of January's winter storm Jonas was enough to dampen the enthusiasm for NBAA's 27th annual Schedulers and Dispatchers Conference held in Tampa, Fla., as show organizers hailed the latest edition as the most successful in its history, surpassing the 25th-anniversary show in New Orleans.

A slate of educational sessions–nearly 30 this year, devoted to aircraft and flight operations, aviation management and aircraft ownership, airspace and airport access, safety and risk management and career and leadership development–provided crucial information for everyone, from those just starting their aviation careers to those with decades of experience under their belts, helping them to fulfill this year's theme of "Unlocking your Potential."

Keynote speaker Ty Bennett, an author and entrepreneur, gave an engaging and entertaining presentation on partnership-based leadership and the power of communication in achieving commitment. His takeaway: "People will support what they help create," and effective leaders will engage workers to "buy in."

The second-day opening session continued the theme of dramatic presentations begun at last year's show whenS&D committee members portrayed the first hour in a flight department after the loss of one of its aircraft. This year's presentation, "the S&D Twilight Zone," was moderated by Bob Hobbi, president and CEO of ServiceElements International. Once again it used volunteer industry members, along with ServiceElements staff, to role-play customer service scenarios involving questionable decision making. After each brief scene, created on the basis of the results

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of an earlier survey to the schedulers and dispatchers community by ServiceElements, an on-stage panel of experts critiqued the choices participants made. The panel consisted of Dorette Kerr, manager of flight administration at John Deere Global Aviation Services; Kellie Rittenhouse, director of aviation services with Hangar Aviation Management; Christian Sasfai, vice president and COO of TacAir, Lisa Swartzwelder, director of shuttle operations and flight administration at L Brands; and COO of recently formed aircraft charter/management provider Alerion.

On the show floor, the more than 500 exhibitor companies seized the opportunity to demonstrate how their services would best benefit the attendees' needs. Taking advantage of this year's setting, Tampa International Jet Center hosted a "Taste of Tampa" champagne reception and tour of its facility on the afternoon before the opening event at the convention center, with locally inspired food provided by tenant Primo's Corporate Catering. It allowed office-bound flight department members to experience a top-flight FBO first-hand.

"This is always one of the best shows for us as the face-to-face meetings with all the flight departments are remarkable at S&D," said Julie Silberman, the FBO's director of customer service and sales, and a veteran of the past eight conferences. "The energy level is always positive and upbeat, which makes the show all the more fun."

"I came here for the first time and what I found is that everybody was very friendly with the new attendees. They explained the whole schedule of the show and which sessions we can check out." said Bernadett Szekely, who recently joined Hungarian trip support provider Apogee as a business development executive. "I learned a lot and made great new connections, which is most important. I'm really looking forward to attending more of these shows."

New this year was the addition of some 40-minute "mini sessions" on popular subjects, which were repeated to allow attendees to take in more than one subject in the standard 90-minute session block.

FLYING OUTSIDE THE U.S.

As always, international ops was one of the key areas of attention, and with the Summer Olympics on tap this year in Brazil, a session hosted by Ana Paula Martin of Lider Aviation and Jeppesen's Thomas Orth on South American operations explained that while the procedures for air travel to the games are still being sorted out by the Brazilian authorities, the finalized plans will likely resemble those for 2014's FIFA World Cup tournament, which Brazil also hosted. According to Martin, Rio de Janeiro's airports will see some schedule modifications, with Jacarapaguá-Roberto Marinho, the city's dedicated general aviation airport, likely closed for the duration of the games because of its proximity to several Olympic venues; Santos Dumont will face closure during aquatic events on surrounding Guanabara Bay. At all international airports in Brazil, private passengers must clear customs at the main passenger terminal, which at some airports can be more than two miles from the general aviation ramp. Martin cautioned anyone planning on attending the games to make hotel reservations as soon as possible from what is already a limited supply. The high tempo of private aircraft traffic to the games, said Orth, suggests schedulers should keep aircraft catering requests in Brazil simple to avoid disappointment from overwhelmed providers.

Alexandra Ferullo, a senior mission advisor with Universal Weather & Aviation, explained recent changes enacted for operations into China. Among the general information she imparted was that landing permits for aircraft entering China are specific. If you have a problem with an aircraft and are obligated to fly the mission with a substitute, an entirely new landing permit must be obtained. For private flights, tourism is not seen as a valid purpose of the visit; all general aviation must

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indicate “business” on the permit application.

Since the beginning of the year, sponsor letters are no longer required for the permit application process for private flights arriving at China’s international airports, with the exception of delivery and medical flights. However, the Chinese business contact will be required to provide a customs letter at the arrival airport. Should the aircraft travel to a domestic airport in a subsequent leg, a sponsor letter will again be required for the application process. Once aircraft arrive in China, crews should not open the cabin door until requested to do so by authorities, Ferullo cautioned. Other international topics included operations in India, as well as Mexico and Central America, and an update on regulations and CBP.

Security also was a major theme at this year’s show, with topics ranging from food safety to the shadowy world of the digital realm, to providing the latest surveillance systems for FBOs. Other sessions dealt with technical topics such as aircraft and runway performance, managing technology, regulatory compliance, understanding aircraft personal use regulations and fuel consolidation. Of particular interest for flight department members was a multi-session program on writing standard operating procedure documents, a task that will continue to grow in importance with the industry’s wider adoption of safety management system culture.

The networking opportunities in what can be an insular industry were of great benefit to most visitors and exhibitors alike at the show. “I think it’s a great spot to come to meet all these people that you speak to on the phone and email,” said first-time attendee Robert Cali, customer experience supervisor at Jet Aviation Teterboro. “You can put the names to the faces and you can build off of it. For me being in the industry for 10 years, I’m hoping to stay in it for the next 40 or 50 years and keep meeting the same faces and keep that client retention going, so it’s a pretty amazing show.”

This year’s show saw a record 517 exhibitors on the show floor in the Tampa Convention Center, up nearly 14 percent from last year’s tally of 454, while also setting a new bar for attendance, cracking the 2,800-attendee mark for the first time and breaking the previous high of 2,737. “We strive to enhance the attendee and exhibitor experience each year and, as a result, more and more people understand this is the place to be,” said Mike Nichols, NBAA’s vice president of operational excellence and professional development, describing the show’s role as the industry’s premier showcase of business aviation support services. “Schedulers and dispatchers are the buyers and they are empowered to come here and make choices.”

The 28th edition of the conference will be held next February 7 to 10, in Fort Worth, Texas. “NBAA is deeply committed to innovation, and that commitment is reflected by all of the standing committees and the continuous improvement of the S&D Conference,” said Danielle Gordon, a corporate communication specialist with Pentastar Aviation and the new S&D committee chair. Having served this past year as S&D Committee vice chair, Gordon succeeded outgoing chair Eve Gregory at the conclusion of the conference. “I’m excited to begin planning for SDC17 in Fort Worth, where we will be featuring programming that will encourage attendees to ‘Steer Your Career’,” she told **AIN**.

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