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Boeing [NYSE: BA] today delivered its final two 717 airplanes to Midwest Airlines and AirTran Airways in a ceremony before thousands of employees, retirees and dignitaries in Long Beach, Calif. The deliveries conclude commercial airplane production in Southern California that began in the 1920s with the Douglas Aircraft Co.

The 717 program, which produced 156 airplanes, pioneered breakthrough business and manufacturing processes for Boeing Commercial Airplanes.

"Our production system is an industry benchmark because of the lean manufacturing and employee involvement practices we pioneered on the 717 in Long Beach," said Boeing Commercial Airplanes President and Chief Executive Officer Alan Mulally. "The 717 has forever redefined how we build airplanes. We're extremely proud of the airplane, our employees and our many supplier partners on the program."

The program was launched by an order from AirTran Airways in 1995, and the airplane quickly became renowned by customers for its excellent economics, performance and reliability. Based on the Douglas DC-9 and launched as the McDonnell Douglas MD-95, the 100-seater was renamed the Boeing 717 after McDonnell Douglas and Boeing merged in 1997.

Douglas opened the Long Beach factory in 1941 as part of President Roosevelt's Arsenal of Democracy - a request to the nation's industries to halt civilian production and assist in making wartime equipment. The facility produced almost 10,000 airplanes for World War II before transitioning to commercial airplane production after the war. Douglas merged with the McDonnell Aircraft Company in 1967, forming the McDonnell Douglas Corporation.

"Truly, it is our people who have acted with tremendous pride and have achieved all of these great accomplishments," said Pat McKenna, vice president and general manager of the 717 program. "They have done this not only on the 717 program but throughout the Douglas history."

More than 15,000 airplanes have been produced in the Long Beach factory.

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For further information:

Tom Brabant

Boeing Commercial Airplanes

562-593-3269

mobile: 425-876-0287
