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Boeing [NYSE: BA] today delivered its first 717-200 airliner for Midwest Airlines during a ceremony at the manufacturer's Long Beach assembly facility.

"This is truly a historic day for our airline," said Timothy E. Hoeksema, chairman and chief executive officer of Midwest Airlines. "Not only did we take delivery of our first Boeing 717 this morning, but its delivery signals the official change of our name to Midwest Airlines -- events that will better position our airline for the future.

"We'd like to thank Boeing and its employees for their diligence in designing and producing this outstanding aircraft, which will significantly reduce our operating costs," Hoeksema added.

Formerly known as Midwest Express, the Milwaukee-based airline ordered 25 of the fuel-efficient Boeing twinjets in April 2002 with options to purchase an additional 25 airplanes. The new 717s will replace the carrier's current fleet of 20 DC-9s. The airplanes are configured for 88 passengers in Midwest's signature two-by-two wide leather seats, and are due to enter service beginning in March this year.

"We want to thank Midwest Airlines for its confidence in the 717's proven capabilities, as the right airplane to give passengers big jet comfort, help improve the airline's financial bottom line, and be a good environmental neighbor to the cities Midwest serves," said Jim Phillips, vice president of the Boeing 717 program in Long Beach.

Midwest Airlines also operates a fleet of 13 MD-80s. It caters primarily to business travelers and features non-stop service to major destinations throughout the U.S. Since taking to the skies in 1984, Midwest has earned a reputation for "The best care in the air" by providing passengers premium service at competitive fares -- and their famous chocolate chip cookies.

The 717 delivered today includes a new enhanced-security flight deck door, helping to assure that Midwest will be in full compliance with more stringent federal standards that take effect April 9.

The Boeing 717-200 is the leading new short-range, high frequency jetliner in its class in revenue service today. More than 100 of the Boeing twinjets have been delivered thus far to airlines on four continents, exceeding customer expectations for low-cost and reliable operation.

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For further information:

Warren Lamb

562-593-3269

John Thom

562-496-7473
