Boeing Delivers AirTran Airways' First Next-Generation 737

Boeing [NYSE: BA] and AirTran Airways last evening celebrated delivery of the airline's first Next-Generation 737 with an airplane "pull for charity" at Seattle's Museum of Flight.

The event featured 20 youths from the Atlanta-based CHRIS Kids, Inc., pulling the new 737-700 with airline crew members and executives, including AirTran Airways Chairman and CEO Joe Leonard, President and COO Bob Fornaro and Boeing President and CEO Harry C. Stonecipher. The group pulled the airplane 65 feet without mechanical assistance.

In total, $65,000 for the charity was raised from Boeing, AirTran Airways, engine manufacturer CFM International and airplane leasing company GECAS. Hertz and Coca Cola also contributed to the award.

"This event highlighted something much more important than the delivery of a new airplane," said Stonecipher. "It demonstrated AirTran Airways' exceptional commitment to its communities, its employees, and its customers."

One of the most successful low-cost airlines, AirTran Airways will use the 737s to replace some contract carrier services and eventually provide transcontinental service as a complement to its Boeing 717 operations.

At a celebratory dinner after the event, Leonard highlighted the value the new 737s will add to AirTran Airways. "If I were our competitors and saw that we took the first of 100 737s, it would be the most stressful day of my life," he said.

Referring to the milestone, Fornaro praised AirTran Airways crew members. "This is a big deal for us," he said of the inaugural delivery. "At AirTran Airways we take nothing for granted. We have pulled ourselves up through difficult times thanks to our unique business plan and hard work and spirit of our crew members. That's why we are here today!"

AirTran Airways flew 40 Chris Kids youths and chaperones along with 50 "Lucky Crew Members" to Seattle for the delivery events. The group toured Boeing's 737 manufacturing facility in Renton, Wash. before the airplane pull.

CHRIS Kids operates nine therapeutic group homes for abused and neglected children, two independent living programs for transitioning youth in need of life skills training, aftercare services and a variety of community programs to help children and families in crisis throughout metropolitan Atlanta.

Prior to the event, Leonard unveiled the new airplane, which carries a new livery, live on television. The paint design will be used on all of the up to 100 737s AirTran Airways ordered last year.

The digitally redesigned Next-Generation 737 is the newest and most technologically advanced airplane in the single-aisle market. Outfitted with a new wing and more powerful engines, the newer 737s can fly higher, faster and farther than previous models and the competition. In addition, the Next-Generation 737 flight deck features the latest liquid-crystal flat-panel displays and is designed to accommodate new communications and flight-management capabilities.

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