



Among the catering personnel in Winston-Salem are (l to r) Judy Salisbury, food services coordinator; Tlara Roberts, manager-galley systems & procedures; Tim Champion, assistant manager-system catering services; David Quinn, manager-system catering services; Pete Van Duser, director-food service; Dave Peck, assistant manager-catering administration; Catherine Sapp, secretary; and Brenda Penney, staff assistant-catering services.

## Catering 'beefs up' our on-time performance

A lot of people don't think of Piedmont Airlines as being a giant restaurant in the sky. But every day, we serve about 33,000 meals to passengers with an efficiency that most restaurants would envy. And though it doesn't get much attention, our efficiency in preparing and storing those meals on the aircraft is one reason our on-time performance is among the best in the industry.

According to catering managers in Winston-Salem, the reason we're so efficient can be stated in one word: employees.

"Our catering personnel in the field are, undoubtedly, the key to the success of catering's contribution to on-time performance," David Quinn, manager-system catering services, said.

Those employees now number about 400—up from just 150 two years ago. Such dramatic growth in such a short time has meant extra effort for everyone in the department. That effort comes through training, job performance and planning as needs change, and it involves cooperation not only within the department, but with other employees in the field as well.

Quinn said there are two main areas of catering services that affect on-time performance: management support from INT to enhance performance, and, more importantly, the actual aircraft servicing by our station caterers.

### locations

Piedmont has nine locations where all catering except for food preparation is done by Piedmont personnel: BWI, CLT, DAY, DCA, GSO, MCO, MIA, ORF and SYR. These employees drive trucks to the kitchens of food preparers such as Dobbs House, load the meals, transport them to the flight line, then transfer the meals to aircraft with other food supplies—while ensuring that hot meals are still piping hot when loaded on the aircraft.

What seems simple on paper can be quite difficult in practice, as caterers juggle their trucks between aircraft arriving and leaving at different times. Many of the aircraft need different meals and many have last-minute changes as less or more people show up than originally planned. This means quick decisions by catering supervisors who coordinate the meal transfers on-line.

"It's our responsibility to work closely with Piedmont catering managers to ensure that we have the proper personnel and truck support to get the job done," Quinn said. "This is especially important at hubs where we constantly add flights."

How well they do their job is evident in our on-time performance statistics. Catering accounts for a small minority of our flight delays, but even that smaller number is something the department wants to improve.

Tim Champion is assistant manager-system catering services in INT. Like Quinn, he spent years in the field as a catering employee before joining the management staff, and he also points to catering personnel as the reason for the department's efficiency.

"If we do take a delay because of catering, we get a full explanation in Winston-Salem," Champion said. "Each delay is then analyzed individually to see what we can do to keep it from reoccurring."

For example, a truck might not have enough meals and have to return to the kitchen for more. Whether the kitchen is at the airport, such as at CLT, or six miles away, like at MCO, this wastes time and can lead to delays. Planning is therefore extremely important.

Piedmont station managers and catering managers at the nine stations work together to analyze meal flights. They examine historical data on flights with significant numbers of no-shows, and on



BWI Agent Gilberto Colon stocks a galley.

flights that often pick-up people at the last minute. As patterns evolve, they plan for fewer or more people than what a flight's bookings indicate.

In addition, contract caterers service Piedmont aircraft in about 50 other stations and their delays are analyzed with their company representatives. In fact, at least one of our contract caterers bases much of its year-end bonuses to each kitchen in large part on the number of delays it has caused the airline. The fewer delays, the more the bonus.

### training

Training is also stressed by catering services. For about two years, the department has had formal training at the company's nine catering stations. Bob Clement, system training manager-catering, conducts classes in those stations with a four-inch thick training manual the department developed. He instructs catering employees on many topics, such as ordering meals, alcoholic beverage service and ways to load meals and supplies on our different aircraft.

"Formal classroom and hands-on training has helped significantly," Champion said. "Now we can emphasize a safe, on-time catering performance before our employees are put on the job."

Trucks are the lifeblood of catering services, and our agents on the trucks are responsible for getting the meals loaded properly so a flight can depart on-time. Helping these agents are catering supervisors and ground coordinators in the nine stations, who must always be a step ahead of potential problems in order to correct them before they amount to delays. Decisions such as whether to take a meal off another flight that will probably have no-shows, or to return to the kitchen, must be made

quickly and with the best information possible.

But sometimes not even the best information can help. At Orlando, train tracks cross the route our trucks use when driving from the kitchen to the airport, and occasionally a long train will hold up traffic.

"That's when employees bail our department out through initiative, stamina and teamwork," Quinn said.

First-class and our new flight to London have also been challenges for catering employees as new equipment, new menus and different loading methods were started virtually overnight on June 15. Our employees met those challenges well, and are meeting those challenges even better as they gain experience.

The department is also studying ways to improve efficiency by reducing the number of inserts that ground service personnel put in seat-back pockets. By possibly consolidating the movie and music cards on the 767-200, it could ease their workload and perhaps help improve an already fine on-time performance.

From small ways to large, Piedmont catering is helping our company achieve the best on-time performance in the industry. According to Quinn, the motivation for our catering employees comes from pride in the company, training and by providing them with the proper tools.

"Each of our catering employees can master the physical aspects of catering," Quinn said. "But a challenge that never ends is getting an aircraft out on-time—because you face that everyday in many different ways, no matter how well you know your job."

## system performance

On-time performance for October was better than last year and last month with 91% of all departures and 85% of all arrivals within 15 minutes of schedule.

The DOT Air Travel Consumer Report for September was recently released, and Piedmont ranked number two at the busiest airports and among the top five performers for all reported airports.

Charlotte was identified in the DOT report as the best destination airport for travelers, with 85.1% of all flights arriving there on time.

