

Back-to-back snowstorms brought out Piedmont's best

Weather reports forecast three to six inches of snow on Thursday, January 22, for much of our system. By the end of the day, more than three times that much had fallen. Then three days later, just as we were getting our operations back to normal, a second storm left more snow and ice.

Of all the businesses affected, none was hit harder than the airline industry. The first winter storm roared across the heart of Piedmont's system, dumping snow on cities in the South where snow removal equipment is in short supply. It left in its wake impassable roads and stranded travelers. Rolling northward, it picked up momentum, confounding our ability to reroute crews and people and impacting virtually all phases of operation. Then on Sunday night, snow and ice fell again.

How well did Piedmont survive?

"Our people came out like champs," Mitchell Carroll, assistant manager, Winston-Salem Reservations, said.

On January 22, our reservations agents answered 119,000 calls, 21 percent over projections, and on the following day, 148,000 calls came in, a 56 percent increase above the norm. At the same time the number of calls was on the upswing, many agents could not get to their jobs.

"In our office, only 59

percent of our staff made it in on Thursday," Carroll explained. "We had to change our recorder to tell customers that there would be a lengthy wait. Normally, people may be on hold 20 to 25 seconds, but that day, the average wait was 205 seconds."

Employees with four-wheel-drive vehicles spent all day and into the night providing transportation for others. Data technicians who work in communications were answering calls, and people in reservations classes, in their last week of training, got some first-hand experience. All our reservations centers were hit hard, because as calls backed up at INTRO, many were redirected to other centers. In addition, under normal conditions, only INTRO remains open all night, but because of the storm, all six centers were staffed.

"Customers, for the most part, were understanding and accepted the wait," Carroll added. "On the 22nd, we had a low number of complaint calls. The snow seemed to bring out the good in everyone."

At the airports, the situation was grim. For example, EWR closed down on Thursday, leaving people stranded with no way to get home.

"We left our satellite open for passengers all night, and about 800 slept on the chairs and floor," Station Manager Frank Woodruff said.

"But despite these conditions, our people did a super job, and most passengers seemed to appreciate our efforts."

Systemwide, cooperation among employees proved to be the key to solving major problems.

"Our aircraft and flight crews were stranded across the system, usually out of position for normally scheduled operations," employees at BWI wrote in a report following the storm. "Piedmont pilot crews once again proved themselves among the professionals who have helped to make Piedmont the finest airline flying. These individuals went out of their way to help cover flights that were found to be without crews and were armed with suggestions to help alleviate the many irregularities that were faced during this time. We would like to express our thanks for the opportunity to work with people of such fine character."

Praise came from other quarters as well. An Eastern manager at BWI wrote to thank Piedmont for providing snow plows to clear the airline's ramp area.

"This was an excellent example of how airlines can survive and work together... Our personnel were very impressed with your equipment, efficiency and cooperation."

"We were most happy with the way things turned out considering the circumstances," BWI Station

Manager Bob Bennington said. "We survived because of the joint effort of all our employees."

CLT, where over 200 flights are scheduled daily, was among the worst hit by the storms. On Thursday and again Monday, as many as 45 aircraft were on the ground at the same time, and on Sunday, 24 aircraft stayed overnight. The gates remained full, and people worked long, hard hours.

"I can't brag enough about our employees," CLT Station Manager Watson Furr said with pride.

"Eighty percent of our agents made it into work on Thursday and again on Monday, some coming in several hours early to make sure they would be here for their shifts. Employees were using their own four-wheel-drive vehicles to get crews to and from the motels. We had to pull agents from the terminal building to de-ice the aircraft, and these people stayed out in the bad weather all day, often without any breaks. I've never seen maintenance crews work any harder. These people did a superb job shuttling aircraft around."

"If it hadn't been for all these dedicated people, things would have been a lot worse."

On Sunday night, 1,200 passengers, caught by cancelled flights and impassable roads, spent the night on our concourse.

In one of the many re-

ports following the storms, an employee wrote: "All personnel working any or all of these days should be greatly admired for their patience and perseverance. Considering the number of cancellations, the reasons for many of them, and the ensuing confusion, without a doubt, Charlotte is privileged to have such special folk."

The final report shows that on January 22, we were able to complete only 50.5 percent of our flights, and of these, only 35 percent departed on time. On Monday, 73.1 percent were completed, 51.2 percent departing on time.

"Anytime our completion rate is less than 97 percent we get concerned," Jim Tabor, manager-system performance, said. "These figures are a barometer of just how severely the storms affected our operation. But despite that very bad week, our on-time performance for the month was only about five points below our goal. In January, we had day after day of very good on-time performance, and except for these five days, would have exceeded our goal."

"We all know how bad these days were, but we kept the airline running. It was a tough week, but everyone from agents to mechanics to controllers to crews met the challenge."

Aetna issues new COB

Effective January 1, 1987, Aetna and most other insurance carriers implemented a new Coordination of Benefits (COB) order of benefit determination (OBD) with respect to a child insured as a dependent under each parent's plan. This new OBD provides that the plan of a parent whose birthdate (month and day, not year of birth) occurs earlier in the calendar year pays the dependent's benefits before the other parent's plan. If one of the plans does not have this newest OBD rule, then the plan of the male parent will pay its benefits before the plan of the female parent. Other COB rules such as the divorced/separated parent rule have not changed.

This new rule evolved in response to allegations that the "male/female" criteria of the former rule were discriminatory.

If there are any questions concerning this change in COB order of benefit determination, please contact the Employee Benefits Office, 770-8405.



Running a safe airline is of primary importance to Piedmont, and employees systemwide worked toward this goal in 1986. To honor these outstanding employees in maintenance, a Maintenance Department Employee Safety Award has been established.

On hand for the presentation of the first annual award are (l to r) Mike Herron, IAM safety committee chairman; Harlie Gordon, director-base maintenance, GSO; Tom Schick, vice president-maintenance and engineering; Bo Sis, former manager-line stations,

DAY, and now director-base maintenance, UCA; Jim Swartz, director-ground safety; and J.P. Richardson, president of IAM. Gordon and Heron represented GSO-MM which took the lead in first aid training and hangar safety training. Sis accepted the award for the DAY line station which has had no lost-time injuries in five years or 125,000 manhours worked.

Other maintenance locations with no lost-time injuries during 1986 included ATL, EWR, TPA, DAY, BOS, RDU, SYR, ROC, BUF, FAY, JAX, PHL, MEM, and GSO's

avionics department. Twenty-six stations reported no lost-time last year: APF, GNV, ILM, SAV, HTS, ISO, ROA, STL, ALB, BGM, BTV, CHO, ELM, ITH, ORH, PVD, UCA, CMI, FWA, GRR, LAN, MSP, SBN, TOL, CHA, and TYS. Of these, agents at ROA worked the most manhours without a lost-time injury.

In the GAG, the line service shop, prop shop, and parts department, all at INT, and CLT and ROA locations also had no lost-time injuries in 1986.