

Putting Down Roots in Boeing Country: Delta Airlines Grows its Presence in Seattle

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By Jeanne McKnight

What does the future hold for the mileage partnership between Delta and Alaska Airlines? How does the Atlanta-based carrier view the latest competition from Asian carriers, China in particular? And in this Boeing city, what does Delta's recent purchase of the wide body Airbus A350 mean for competition between the two giant manufacturers? These were some of the questions on the minds of Seattle #4 members after this past Wednesday's presentation by Delta Airlines Seattle VP, Mike Medeiros, who made one point loud and clear: Delta has a clear plan for growing its presence in the Seattle market—a plan that includes giving back in a big way to the community.

With travel and how we travel on the agenda, **President Cathy Gibson** called the September 28 meeting to order. **Nancy Cahill** gave the Inspiration for the Day. As a tribute to the beautiful fall weather, our banjo-playing **Trish Bostrom** led a spirited round of "You Are My Sunshine." **Brad Fowler** introduced visiting Rotarians, and **Susie Roe** introduced guests—including prospective members seated at **Jane Tornatore's** table.



New members, **Dave Lennox** (CEO of Special Olympics, Washington) and **Kevin Crane** (Crane Jewelers) were presented to us by **Anna Liotta** and **Jordon Voss**, respectively.

In her introduction of the next program segment, **President Cathy** reminded everyone of the importance of face-to-face conversations—an important way of communicating in this digital age. Her goal for the Club this year, noted **President Cathy**, is for every member of Seattle #4 to get acquainted with 10 members,

"people you don't already know." Toward that end, **Trent Mummery** then kicked off a Table Talk session, asking us to introduce ourselves to our table-mates with a favorite travel story.

Michael Troyer then introduced the main program speaker, Mike Medeiros, noting that Medeiros hails from Kitty Hawk, NC—where Orville and Wilbur Wright achieved the first successful airplane flights in 1903. Prior to Medeiros' main presentation, **Patrick Carter** presented Medeiros with a plaque from the Rotary Boys and Girls Club, thanking Delta for its support of the new playground.

Medeiros kicked off his presentation by letting us know that Delta is not only here to stay and grow but also to



make a positive impact on the region. He noted that his dad was a member of the Kitty Hawk Rotary (a club of “about 20 members”), and that through his attending meetings of his father’s club, he has come to admire Rotary as an organization for its good work in the community and the world. (Membership recruiters, take note!) Community service, he pointed out, is very important to Delta Airlines. “Our rules of the road, and guiding principles are to always give back to those communities where we live and where we work.”

Case in point: the new playground at the Rotary Boys and Girls Club in the Central District—Delta’s fourth playground to date in Seattle. <http://news.delta.com/delta-builds-fourth-kaboom-playground-seattle>. He cited other community organizations in Seattle that Delta has supported, including the Millionair Club Charity, Northwest Harvest, and the Arts Fund—to name just a few. “We are going to continue to make a [community] commitment in Seattle,” Medeiros said.

Medeiros also noted a few other key facts about Delta in the region:

- Delta employs more than 3,200+ workers in this region, from pilots to mechanics to flight attendants to other customer service jobs. These are Delta employees: “We don’t outsource.”
- Delta is now the second-largest operator of Boeing planes on the planet.
- More than 180 million passengers fly Delta yearly.
- And, a mark of pride for Medeiros, “For five years in a row, Delta has been ranked #1 Airlines by *Business Travel News*.”

And Delta, to paraphrase its ad slogan, has indeed “kept climbing” in Seattle.

In 2013, there were 31 Delta flights leaving SeaTac daily. That number has grown to 153 flights daily to 45 destinations. And, Medeiros added, “We’re a long way from being done.” Delta will soon operate 200+ flights from SeaTac from 30 gates.



Other news: The airline will soon (October 2016) open a new Sky Club between Concourses A & B. This 21,000 square-foot space will be Delta’s largest on the West Coast, featuring 30-foot glass viewing windows, local food and beverages, and it will display artwork from local artists.

No doubt about it, if Medeiros’ talk is any indication, Delta has Big Plans for Seattle, including—possibly—an eventual ending of its mileage partnership with Alaska Airlines. That

much became clear during the Q&A period, when Medeiros was asked about the future of its mileage partnership with Alaska. The partnership works “for now,” he said, adding that “ultimately, customers will have to make a choice.”

Other questions touched on the recent Delta purchase of Airbus A350s over the Boeing 787-9. Why Airbus over Boeing? “Boeing did not have the delivery slots that Delta needed; they couldn’t shift their delivery schedules to meet our need.”

How does Delta regard competition from various Asian airlines, such as China Air? Airfares on many of those carriers are “crazy low,” Medeiros asserted, partly “because they need to build their brand” in the region. Ultimately, he noted, “It’s our responsibility to earn your trust and your business. We’ll do [that] with a competitive fare, but we won’t give it away.”

Why doesn’t Delta support the Ex-Im Bank? “We don’t believe our government should shore up government-run airlines (such as Emirates) that are subsidized,” Medeiros asserted. “We’re standing up for U.S. jobs.”



Finally, in her closing remarks, **President Cathy** challenged us to do our part to end the political acrimony that has dogged this election season. We need to engage in civil discourse, she said, suggesting that we all take the time to read an article the October issue of *The Rotarian*, “Elect to be civil: It’s time to make politics less personal,” by Steve Almond. Said **President Cathy**, “I recommend this article to you.” <https://www.rotary.org/myrotary/en/news-media/culture-elect-be-civil>