

# Stranded?

## Travelers brace for Northwest strike

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Northwest Airlines' 6,150 pilots may go on strike at 12:01 a.m. Saturday, creating headaches for Oakland County travelers and travel agents alike.

"We are really trying to stay away from ticketing passengers on Northwest," said Dina Reese, manager of Oakland Travel Service in Troy. "In fact, I have a honeymooning couple flying out on Northwest on Aug. 30 and they are shaking in their shoes."

Northwest Airlines, the nation's fourth largest airline with 50,000 employees, is currently in negotiations with all six of its U.S. labor unions. More than 70 percent of Wayne County Detroit Metropolitan Airport passengers fly on Northwest.

"If Northwest strikes, a lot of people from our area simply won't be able to travel," said Dean Markwardt, owner of Suburban Travel in Rochester. "The other airlines that fly out of Detroit Metro just won't have enough seats to accommodate those who are affected by the strike."

### Impasse

The National Mediation Board declared an impasse in negotiations between Northwest Airlines and its pilots union, the Air Line Pilots Association, International on July 30. After declaring the impasse, a 30-day cooling off period began, but that period is scheduled to end Saturday.

If no agreement is reached between Northwest and the union by the midnight deadline, the pilots will strike.

President Clinton, however, could order pilots to return for up to another 60 days of work as soon as the strike is called. A Clinton-appointed panel called the President's Emergency Board would convene at that time to listen to both Northwest Airlines and the ALPA. After 30 days the board, acting as arb-

trator, would suggest a plan to the pilot's union and to Northwest. The union and Northwest would have 30 more days to consider the plan at which point the pilots could strike if they felt the plan did not meet their demands.

### Passenger anger

Are the pilots right to strike? Patty Riker from Bloomfield Hills doesn't think so. "I think that these negotiations should end and that the pilots are making enough money already," she said as she checked in late one afternoon at Northwest's Detroit Metro terminal.

Jerry Fielding, a Northwest pilot and spokesperson for the ALPA, acknowledges that Riker's reaction is typical. "The public perceives airline pilots to be some of the highest paid hourly workers in the U.S., but what the public doesn't know is that Northwest pilots have not had a raise since August of 1992." According to Fielding, the salary freeze has remained despite the fact that Northwest has had five years of record profits and has posted the highest profit margins in the airline industry.

According to Fielding and literature passed out by the ALPA, Northwest Airlines was on the verge of bankruptcy in 1993 when its pilots took a 15.5 percent pay cut in exchange for stock shares in the company. "We exchanged money for stocks

that at that time were worthless," he said. "We shared in the pain in 1993 and now we want to share in the gain. This situation is painful and embarrassing for us because we feel that this is our airline, too."

Jim Faulkner, spokesperson for Northwest Airlines, could not be reached for comment.

Even the threat of a pilots' strike is affecting local travelers' plans. At the baggage claim area at Detroit Metro, Beverly Hills resident Meg Peters stood waiting for her mother's luggage to slide down the ramp.

"The strike has definitely affected our vacation plans. We were supposed to go to British Columbia on Sept. 1, but we had to make back up plans instead," she said, glancing occasionally at the turning carousel. "So, now we have two vacations planned: one to Harbor Springs in case the strike happens, or, if not, then we'll go to British Columbia."

### Limited options

Should the strike occur, travelers' options are limited when it comes to flying on airlines other than Northwest out of Detroit.

"The fact of the matter is, nobody has spare airplanes lying around that could run additional flights out of Detroit Metro," said Stephen Economy, Deputy Director of Airports for Wayne County Detroit Metropolitan Airport. "What may happen is the other airlines

## Tips from travel pros

If you are planning a trip in the next few weeks on Northwest Airlines, here are some tips from local travel agents that might help alleviate the stress of a strike situation:

If your trip is important, book another ticket on another airline to be safe. Booking a refundable ticket is the safest bet but will be more expensive.

Make sure that your ticket is a paper one, not an e-ticket (electronic ticket.) E-tickets are tickets that are booked ahead,

entered on Northwest's computer, and require only the traveler to present positive identification upon check-in.

"Some of our customers have 'e-tickets' which could be a problem if their flight is canceled because of the strike," Dean Markwardt of Suburban Travel in Rochester. "The rea-

son is while other airlines will accept ticket transfers signed over by Northwest, they won't accept electronic ticket transfers from Northwest."

Check out other travel options. Sometimes traveling by car or by train can be faster than you think. A trip to Chicago's O'Hare Airport by car from Detroit Metro Airport is roughly 292 miles, or approximately five-hours depending on traffic.

If you must travel with Northwest on or around the strike deadline, know your options with other carriers. "We are constantly looking at other airlines for backup but so far, it's been difficult to secure," said Mary Ellen Rood, owner of the Travel Agent in Bloomfield Hills. "It just doesn't look good for any of us."

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