



PLANE TALK

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HOLIDAY CHEER IN THE LAST FRONTIER

Photo by Dana Rosso, Courtesy of Alaska Air National Guard

OPERATION SANTA CLAUS

By Spc. Grace Nechanicky
Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

The Alaska National Guard continued with the tradition of Operation Santa Claus again this year, spreading holiday joy to remote Alaskan villages by delivering gifts to children of two communities. Gifts were delivered to Buckland December 14, while a flight to Chevak was delayed several times due to inclement weather. Efforts to deliver Santa’s packages to the small community will resume shortly after the holidays.

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ALASKA DOT&PF DIVISION
OF STATEWIDE AVIATION

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A MESSAGE FROM DC BINDER

Happy winter everyone! As the season brings great changes in our environment, I want to encourage everyone to take the time to review the challenges that come with colder weather. Whether it is a five-minute commute to the airport, or a long-haul flight, good judgement remains the best tool in keeping safe. Be prepared, work as a team, and never let compulsion take the place of your good judgement. Speaking of safety, I want to express my appreciation to all those who contributed to the recently completed FAA Alaska Aviation Safety Initiative (FAASI) effort. Many key elements were identified that make Alaska aviation unique and demand a different viewpoint from an airspace, infrastructure, operations, and weather standpoint. The result of the initiative was several solid recommendations that will help drive funding and policy decisions in the future.



This winter has been a busy one for DOT&PF as we wrap-up an encouraging summer/fall aviation season and look to bright things in the coming year. Development at both ANC and FAI continue as several cargo projects move forward and BLM shifts their operation from Ft. Wainwright to Fairbanks International. These projects serve to reinforce what an economic engine our aviation system brings to Alaska. The recently signed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) will serve to inject significant federal funding into the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) for Alaska, and the Department is working hard to identify what additional projects may be added and/or moved forward in the capital improvement program. Broadly speaking, Alaska looks to receive an additional ~\$1 billion dollars in aviation funding over the next 5 years, with additional funds available through competitive grant opportunities.

A couple other changes recently involve Department personnel. I want to congratulate Linda Bustamante on her retirement. In her 15 years serving the Alaska DOT&PF she has celebrated many accomplishments, including this very publication. We wish her well and will miss not only her work but her character and the joy she brought to all she worked with! Help me to welcome her replacement, Dylan Blankenship, to the Division of Statewide Aviation. Dylan graduated from UAA's aviation management program, where he also achieved flight experience. He comes to us most recently from working with rural communities on behalf of the Administration for Native Americans. Finally, we welcome a new Commissioner as well. Ryan Anderson accepted the Department's top spot in September and brings a wealth of experience to the position. With many years in the department, and recently serving as Northern Region's Director, Ryan has ensured a seamless transition and postures the Department well going into the new year.

As we enter the new year, I want to thank you for all you bring to Alaska. As we look back on a challenging year, let's recognize our accomplishments and look forward to great things on the horizon. Happy Holidays, and Fly Safe Alaska!

John Binder
Deputy Commissioner



“He is widely respected across northern Alaska for cultivating positive relationships with all impacted stakeholders while completing vital public transportation projects on time and within budget.”

-Governor Mike Dunleavy

RYAN ANDERSON, NEW COMMISSIONER

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

Ryan Anderson, P.E., serves as Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities. Under his direction, the department is responsible for the planning, design, construction, and the maintenance and operation of Alaska’s transportation system, public buildings and facilities. He believes that a sound transportation system is a foundation for community vitality, and that connecting people and cultures through infrastructure provides economic opportunities that improve people’s lives. He most recently served as the Director of DOT&PF’s Northern Region.

Since moving to Alaska in 1993 to attend the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Anderson has worked both in mining and transportation, with his transportation career beginning in 2000 as an entry level engineer for DOT&PF. Since then, Anderson has worked through the ranks designing and managing road and airport projects, with a focus on improving transportation in rural Alaska.

Since receiving his Alaska Civil Engineering license in 2003, he received recognition for transportation excellence and innovation from the Northwest Arctic Leadership Team, WASHTO, FAA, FHWA, and the Alaska Society of Engineers, Fairbanks Chapter. He is currently a member of the AASHTO Council on Highways and Streets.

OPERATION SANTA CLAUS

The Alaska National Guard, in partnership with the Salvation Army, took the same necessary COVID-19 precautions to ensure safety as last year, but remained committed to sharing in the holiday spirit with the small communities which included nearly 650 children total. Alaska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen helped pack, load, transfer and unload the cargo.

“Operation Santa has been going for 66 years,” said Air National Guard Maj. Chelsea Aspelund, the 176th Wing chief of public affairs. “It started in 1956 in St. Mary’s after the Alaska National Guard responded to a request for assistance following extreme flooding and draught that impacted subsistence fishing and hunting in the community.”

Despite the hardships and uncertainty brought on by the pandemic during last year’s Op Santa season, the mission was able to safely continue after a few mitigation procedures, such as limiting contact and minimizing the number of personnel involved in the mission.

“It’s important for Operation Santa to continue because this is an opportunity for the Alaska National Guard to reach into rural Alaska and really demonstrate our ability to be there to support the communities,” said Aspelund.

Villages chosen to participate in Op Santa are selected based off of several factors, including hardships that the community has faced, in a remote or isolated location, and whether the community has requested support.

It’s kind of hard for [the villages] to enjoy a Christmas like it used to be with all that’s going on,” said Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Sallaffie, facility attendant at Bethel’s National Guard armory. “It makes a difference.”



Photo by Dana Rosso

Photo by Dana Rosso





Photo by Maj. Chelsea Aspelund

Sgt. Craig Lyons, crew chief, Alaska Army National Guard, B Company, 2-211 General Support Aviation Battalion, helps unload two hundred sixty-one gift packages from a CH-47 Chinook helicopter in Buckland, Alaska during Operation Santa Claus, Dec. 14, 2021.

The gifts in this year's holiday delivery totaled 4,420 pounds of backpacks, books, school supplies, snacks, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and gifts categorized by age.

Pallets of boxes were loaded onto an HC-130J Combat King II aircraft here, and transported to Bethel and Nome Dec. 2 where they were staged for further delivery to the two remote villages. The fixed-wing aircraft is used first because of its capability to carry more cargo faster, which allows the transport to multiple locations in one day-trip. The gifts are then transported from the staging locations to the villages via helicopters because they can land in the villages in challenging winter conditions.

Buckland received their gifts after they were transported 139 miles northeast from Nome on a CH-47 Chinook helicopter Dec. 14. A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter is staged to fly the gifts 118 miles northwest of Bethel to the village of Chevak once weather permits.

The Alaska National Guard and Salvation Army continue to maintain a strong commitment to Operation Santa Claus, hoping to share neighborly joy with rural communities in Alaska.

"[Op Santa] is an important community engagement for the Alaska National Guard to help maintain and build trust and partnership with others throughout the state," said Aspelund.

"It means a whole lot [to the children]," said Sallaffie.

"Bringing presents out to the villages in these tough times, it's pretty awesome."



Photo by Dana Rosso

FAA ALASKAN AVIATION SAFETY INITIATIVE FINDINGS

An excerpt from www.faa.gov

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) released recommendations on how to increase aviation safety in Alaska after a yearlong, sweeping examination of safety issues specific to the challenges of flying in Alaska, where more than 80 percent of its communities are accessible only by air.

Among the recommendations are: increasing and improving weather data reporting and forecasting, expanding satellite-based Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) air-traffic control coverage to more areas, and improving navigation charting. The FAA will now begin developing a roadmap for implementing the recommendations in the near- and mid-term, focusing on initiatives with the greatest safety benefits.

“Alaska depends on aviation more than any other state, and we are committed to doing everything possible to make flying safer,” **said FAA Administrator Steve Dickson.** “We teamed up with the flying community and together developed this comprehensive blueprint for our safety work going forward.”

5 PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Install Automated Weather Observing Systems (AWOS) at airports that don't have them and where the systems would have the biggest safety benefit, and continue testing a new technology called Visual Weather Observation System (VWOS).
- Develop a comprehensive Alaska airspace navigation strategy, including creating lower-altitude flight routes and improving GPS backup systems.
- Continue a collaborative working group initiative in partnership with the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association that's verifying and adding mountain pass information on aeronautical charts, and continue to hold FAA bi-annual charting meetings, allocating time for Alaska-specific discussions.
- Continue efforts to expand ADS-B services to areas that don't have it, and continue outreach efforts to encourage operators to equip their aircraft with ADS-B.
- Continue existing safety outreach programs and look for new opportunities where different FAA divisions could work together to address safety issues from multiple perspectives.



Pictured: Tok AWOS

The FAA will develop a draft roadmap by mid-February 2022, identify the resources necessary to implement it and will then seek aviation stakeholder feedback on the roadmap through May 2022. The FAA will continue those initiatives already underway and will begin to incorporate aspects of the new initiatives by summer 2022. A progress report will be submitted to stakeholders by September 30, 2022.

ALASKAN AVIATION MUSEUM WELCOMES NEW HALL OF FAME MEMBERS



The Ted Stevens Lifetime Achievement Award presented by Rick Morrison. Elizabeth Stevens asked that everyone join on the stage if you interned or worked for Senator Stevens. Left to Right: Rick Morrison, Sen. Lisa Murkowski, Catherine Stevens, Ben Stevens, Elizabeth Stevens, Julie Fate Sullivan, Karina Waller, Robin Phillips, Brent Cole, Clark Penney and Larry Burton.

For 2021, the Alaskan Aviation Museum honored Ted Stevens, Marge and Bob Baker, and Ron Sheardown by inducting them into the Alaska Aviation Museum Hall of Fame. Ted Stevens, former republican senator for Alaska, is a major proponent of aviation and is perhaps best known in this respect for being a driving force behind making and getting funding for significant safety improvements of Ted Stevens International Airport in Anchorage. Marge and Bob Baker were pioneer aviators who established Baker Aviation, helped develop Red Dog Mine, and spent considerable time and effort in their later years supporting the critical role of aviation in Alaskan life. Ron Sheardown is a prospector, entrepreneur, and founder of Greatland Exploration Limited, a mining company with interests in various countries worldwide. A prolific aviator, Sheardown has conducted numerous flights, explorations, and rescues throughout Northern Canada, Alaska, and the North Pole. These seminal aviators and this annual celebration of their feats is at the core of the Alaska Aviation Museum's mission to preserve, display, educate, and honor Alaska's aviation heritage.

It's easy for airport employees to lend a hand to travelers with visible cues of a disability like a passenger in a wheelchair. But there are other "hidden disabilities" that are less apparent such as autism, Crohn's disease, dementia, hearing impairment, multiple sclerosis, PTSD, and many more! According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 26 percent of American adults have some type of disability, many of them not visually apparent.

In order to better meet the needs of all travelers with disabilities, Fairbanks International Airport (FAI) is launching the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program beginning December 15, 2021. Travelers with hidden disabilities may voluntarily request a sunflower lanyard or wristband to let airport staff know that they may need a little help or extra patience.

Passengers may request free Sunflower lanyards or wristbands at participating partner locations: Alaska Airlines ticket counter, AVIS Car Rental desk, Delta Air Lines ticket counter, or at the FAI Administration Office during normal business hours.



FAIRBANKS LAUNCHES HIDDEN DISABILITIES SUNFLOWER PROGRAM

TED STEVENS ANCHORAGE INTERNATIONAL

SAY HELLO TO "PRECIOUS CARGO"

A rogue furball was found scampering through the TSA security checkpoint during the busy holiday travel season after a passenger found, and then released him. TSA was able to detain the hamster until ANC Airport Police and Fire took it into custody. The ANC Operations team vouched for its character (they just couldn't say no to those chubby little cheeks) and promised to be a good third party custodian until a safe and happy home could be found. Precious Cargo is currently being well taken care of at the Manager's Office at ANC. While all are happy this story has a happy ending for this hamster, ANC should not be considered a place to surrender pets. Please make arrangements to have your pet(s) cared for or rehomed before heading out to the airport.

*Thank you to all of the airport staff that came together for Precious Cargo!



FAIRBANKS INTERNATIONAL

BEAR, THE CRISIS RESPONSE CANINE, JOINS FAI

FAI is excited to announce the Fairbanks chapter of Crisis Response Canines (CRC) is now part of the FAI terminal family. Bear, our CRC canine friend, is badged and ready for business.

Crisis Response Canines is a volunteer organization. Everything is accomplished by the generous spirit of volunteers and commitment to the common good.

Crisis Response Canines provides canine teams that are trained to gently, safely break through the barriers of isolation caused by crisis, allowing individuals to re-connect to their families, friends.



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Plane Talk is an official publication of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Division of Statewide Aviation. The intent of *Plane Talk* is to keep the aviation community informed. For any questions or comments, please contact Dylan Blankenship at dylan.blankenship@alaska.gov

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