

Columbia Aircraft shakes up senior mgt; lays off 185 more workers

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Bend aircraft manufacturer expects lay offs to last four- to six-weeks; Announces new CEO and four key senior management executives

Following on the heels of a March 8th announcement that Columbia Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation was permanently letting go 10 percent of its workforce, the company today announced a "temporary workforce alignment" that will lay off an additional 185 employees for an expected four- to six-week period. In a senior management shakeup designed to "reposition the company for success and growth", Columbia also announced the appointments of a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Restructuring Officer (CRO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Chief Operating Officer (COO).

The senior management restructuring includes the appointment of long-time Columbia and aviation industry veteran Wan Abd Majid as the new CEO. Majid and the Board of Directors also appointed highly-experienced executives to the three other key senior management positions.

Current CEO Bing Lantis will step down to attend to family matters and other personal interests.

In addition to the senior management appointments, officials announced the temporary furlough of 185 employees. The furlough allows Columbia to execute necessary measures to refine production and more aggressively pursue "Lean Manufacturing" and "Lean Enterprise" process improvements.

The company's present expectation is to recall the furloughed employees after a brief four- to six-week period. During that period, tooling will be upgraded, process improvements will be implemented, resolution of customer service issues will be accelerated and the company will continue to deliver customer aircraft at the normal four aircraft per week rate.

"Our people are our most valuable resource," said Majid. "However, the nature of the aviation industry and the realities of our current business situation require that we take a number of critical short-term actions to ensure our long-term success. The fact that we must temporarily furlough a portion of our highly-skilled workforce is an unfortunate consequence of timing. Still, Columbia is committed to do everything possible to care for our dedicated employees during this improvement process to ensure that they return to a stronger company with an even brighter future." Once the manufacturing process improvements are in place, company officials state that they intend to recall the furloughed employees.

During the furlough period, Columbia Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation will:

- Continue to provide medical benefits for furloughed employees and dependents

- Invite furloughed employees to participate in Lean Manufacturing training sessions to prepare for their return to work

â€¢ Maintain contact with furloughed employees regarding their status and anticipated return to work dates

â€¢ Provide a return to work cash incentive

During the furlough period, the remaining 335 employees will advance key initiatives including:

â€¢ Delivery of four aircraft per week

â€¢ Retooling to improve production efficiency and capacity

â€¢ Company-wide implementation of Lean Enterprise practices

â€¢ Improving customer support

Backing Majid, the new senior management of Carl Young, CRO; Michael Culver, COO and Rich Reighard, CFO join forces with the existing management team. Young, Culver and Reighard each have extensive business management experience including backgrounds with several aviation-related companies.

“In the coming months we will improve the company in a number of areas including production efficiency and customer care. We’re committed to making Columbia Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation an industry leader for years to come while providing an ownership experience that is second to none,” stated Majid. “These initial changes are tangible evidence of the beginning of a metamorphosis. We are all very excited about what is on the horizon for our employees and customers.”

Columbia, based in Bend, Oregon, manufactures a variety of all-composite aircraft including the Columbia 400 – arguably the world’s fastest certified piston-single. The Columbia 350, 350i, 350SL and 350SLX are normally-aspirated, four-place aircraft with a cruise speed of 191 knots. The Columbia 400, 400i, 400SL and 400SLX are intercooled, twin-turbocharged, four-place aircraft certified to FL250 with a cruise speed of 235 knots. In addition to providing legendary performance, both models are renowned for their high level of standard equipment, quality and safety features, including dual electrical systems, dual wing spars and Utility Category certification.

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