

Exciting Times

BY JOY FINNEGAN
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Every year I think to myself, what a time to be alive and working in aviation. We are, in fact, living through amazing times in aviation. There is rarely a dull moment, whether it be the ups and downs of Covid, the recent threat of tariffs from the current administration, or going from giddy-up to whoa in pilot hiring or the reverse of that in the aviation maintenance industry.

There is continued growth in the commercial aviation realm. Every time we think it can't possibly get any bigger, we are proved wrong. Even when there is a global event like Covid, we come back stronger than ever. Pent-up demand for travel creates an environment for growth. Humans love to travel and have a need to travel, whether it be for work, pleasure, to see family or any combination thereof.

Quick figures from A4A reveal commercial aviation drives 5% of U.S. GDP — the equivalent of \$1.45 trillion in 2024. Every day, U.S. airlines operate more than 27,000 flights carrying 2.7 million passengers to/from nearly 80 countries and 61,000 tons of cargo to/from more than 220 countries. A4E (Airlines for Europe) also reports big numbers: about 1.9 million passengers a day, eight million flights and more than 12 million jobs. And these aren't even the growth markets. The Asia-Pacific region is the relative newbie, predicted to grow by leaps and bounds in the next 20 years.

Globally, the numbers are staggering. According to the International Air Transportation Association (IATA), aviation holds 86.5 million jobs, contributes \$4.1 trillion to the global economy and is 3.9% of the total global GDP. All of the numbers here were published in 2024 and reflect the previous year when we were still seeing impacts of and recovering from the Covid crisis.

With the huge numbers mentioned, we need to ensure aircraft are safe and properly maintained more than ever. There was a rash of aircraft accidents early this year which caused concern among the flying public about the safety of the industry. I saw numerous comments on social media asking if it was safe to fly. We know it is but it's always concerning when the flying public starts to worry.

As always, this issue of **Aviation Maintenance** includes timely topics that will help increase understanding, give insight into what successful companies are doing, share ideas on what is working in the industry and provide info about products and services that can assist in our shared goal of keeping aircraft safely flying as we meet the challenge of those numbers.

Our cover story takes a look at non-destructive testing (NDT). We spoke to NDT service providers like SEAL Aviation and FL Technics, who sponsored the story, and makers of specialized products like Evident and Waygate, who are leading the way in providing services and technology to help ensure, in the most efficient way, the aircraft engines and structures we fly in every day are sound. Check out that story on page 38.

Next, we have an interview with the leader of the Lithuanian-based powerhouse MRO, FL Technics. This company has literally taken off in the MRO market. With incredible focus, CEO Zilvinas Lapinskas has guided the company from a small, one-hangar

operation in Vilnius with a few Russian and ex-Soviet Union countries' airline operators for clients, to a global force to be reckoned with. In our wide-ranging talk, we spoke about the early days, their growth and their new project in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. We've covered the growth of this company for years and it has been amazing to watch. Check out my chat with Zilvinas Lapinskas starting on page 24.

We also delve into robotic process automation — RPA for short. Although that has a nice futuristic ring to it, this isn't your father's robotics. It's a new take on how to automate tedious, time-consuming, labor intensive processes. With the shortage of maintenance personnel, automating anything possible is going to be key to gaining the competitive edge. Learn how software providers like Ultramain Systems and Ramco utilize RPA and the benefits of implementing them, especially as MROs become more digital. That story begins on page 30.

From the moment an aircraft pulls onto the ramp or into a hangar, until it rolls out the door, we need ground support equipment (GSE) to assist in taking care of that aircraft. Of course, it's also used for refueling, boarding and other essential phases. We take a look at the crucial role these pieces of equipment play in supporting the operations of aircraft while on the ground, maintaining safety and ensuring that flights can depart and arrive on schedule. That story begins on page 46.

Next, we had to talk about tariffs. The use of tariffs seems inevitable. But as we have already seen, the current administration has caused some confusion as it begins to impose them, but almost as quickly pauses them. How are tariffs going to impact our business? We asked experts Jason Dickstein, general counsel with the Aviation Suppliers Association (ASA) and Christian Klein, executive vice president of the Aeronautical Repair Station Association (ARSA) to give us their take on the tricky talk of tariffs. Read more on page 52.

As the industry continues to struggle to get new people trained and ready to work, let me also highlight this workforce initiative taking place in Canada. It is getting people trained and up to speed quickly and safely, without spending a fortune. Learn how the Work-Based Learning Consortium is succeeding starting on page 60.

We also have a slate of columns from amazing experts. First, anytime we have questions about the challenging supply chain situation, we reach out to Chris Brumitt, managing director at supply chain consultancy Maine Pointe. He says moving to a predictive supplier quality process is the way to go — see his column on page 64. We have our trusty column, Legal Spin, in which Jason Dickstein also suggests ways to break supply chain bottlenecks on page 68. And finally, Billy Webb, senior director at Mass Virtual, explains how extended reality (XR) could help fill the growing skills gap among maintenance technicians on page 70.

Hope you enjoy this issue and the **Aviation Maintenance** team will see you in Atlanta for the MRO Americas show! **AM**

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