

PCN invests in airline EZ-Air

ST. EUSTATIUS—The board of Pension Fund Caribbean Netherlands (PCN) has decided, after a preparatory period of almost 18 months, to invest in the purchase of an aircraft for airline EZ-Air. With the loan to Bonaire-based Medicair NV, by means of PCN's Participation Company Caribbean Netherlands (PMCN), two Beechcraft 1900D aircraft will shortly be purchased for regional flights, including flights from Bonaire to St. Eustatius.

In addition, the required working capital is also provided for the start-up of the EZ-Air operation, PCN stated. The aircraft in question were, until recently, used for flight operations on behalf of Air Canada Express.

The aircraft, with 19 seats each, will be used under the brand name EZ-Air for flights between Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao; for flights between Bonaire and Statia; and for flights to Colombia.

The aircraft have been specially selected for their ability to fly directly to various destinations within an acceptable time and with



Signing the agreement for the purchase of an aircraft for EZ-Air are, from left: Vice President of Pension Fund Caribbean Netherlands (PCN) Valdemar Marcha, PCN president Harald Linkels, Chief Executive Officer of EZ-Air Rene Winkel and EZ-Air consultant Percy Lauffer.



The EZ-Air Beechcraft 1900D aircraft.

sufficient comfort. The Beechcraft planes have a pressurized cabin, and passengers can walk upright in the cabin due to the high

construction of the machines. The relatively long distances, for example on the route between Bonaire and Statia, brought about

several requirements for the aircraft, such as a toilet and reasonable baggage capacity.

Director of Medicair and

EZ-Air Rene Winkel is very experienced in regional aviation. He previously flew as a captain for Winair and Antillean Airlines ALM. With Medicair, he has been carrying out ambulance flights between Bonaire and Colombia since 2000.

EZ-Air is not new to the islands either. In the past, Winkel has been executing flights between Bonaire and Curaçao for several years with two Britten-Norman aircraft.

PCN had various considerations to invest in EZ-Air. "First, it must be said that this is a solid business case," says PCN chairman Harald Linkels. "Over the past few months, we have worked intensively with the EZ-Air team and together we have looked at the type of aircraft, the routes that can be served and the commercial plan. From the very start we noticed in a positive sense the solidity and the level of detail in the business plan," says Linkels.

In addition, Linkels says PCN mainly wants to invest locally in matters that benefit the islands and residents. "Although it is regularly stated that aviation is a risky industry, it is also a fact that we as islands can't do without aviation," says Linkels.

The PCN chairman says it is extremely sour that every time the islands in the region pick the bitter fruits of the malaise in aviation in Curaçao. "As soon as something goes wrong there, as in the case of ALM, DCA, DAE and now Insel Air, this has dramatic consequences...People can't leave the island, doctor

visits have to be cancelled and doing business...in Curaçao or Aruba has become nearly impossible," says Linkels. "It is also important for St. Eustatius to have a direct and reliable connection with Bonaire.

Winkel is also positive about the collaboration with PCN and PMCN. "We have always held constructive discussions with the board of PCN and they understood where we wanted to go with our plans."

PCN will, as part of the agreement, name two persons in the Supervisory Board of EZ-Air, which will consist of three persons. As a result, PCN will be able to closely monitor the way in which EZ-Air is managed and will participate in important company decisions.

"On the PCN board we have Valdemar Marcha, who as former ALM director, has a huge experience in the field of aviation and airline management, says Linkels.

According to Linkels, PCN with its investment will help create a stable and solid company that will finally bring reliable and affordable flights to the islands.

The purchased airplanes cannot be put into service immediately. "The aircraft will soon be flown from Canada to Miami for the installation of some instruments necessary for the certification of the aircraft in Curaçao," says Winkel. EZ Air is currently still undergoing the certification process in Curaçao. Winkel says the airline gets "good cooperation" from Curaçao Civil Aviation Authority (CCAA).

Copa soon to fly to Curaçao daily

WILLEMSTAD—With an increase from four to seven weekly flights from Panama to Curaçao, Copa Airlines say it looks forward to fostering stronger business and commercial ties between these destinations and the rest of the Americas.

Offering more flight options through its Hub of the Americas in Panama City than any other inter-

national carrier, the subsidiary of Copa Holdings and member of the global Star Alliance network will now operate daily flights to the island as of July 17, with convenient schedules and greater connectivity with the rest of the continent.

CEO Pedro Heilbron: "We are constantly seeking opportunities to offer our passengers more flight options. This dedication to

service led us to evaluate every route and examine the possibility of increasing flight frequency. We see potential in this market as demand has increased over this past year."

The flights depart from Panama at 9:13am and land in Curaçao at 12:18 pm (local time). The return leg leaves at 1:18pm and arrives at 2:30pm (local time).

"With these new flights in the Americas and the Caribbean," Heilbron added, "passengers who want to visit these important tourist destinations will find that they have more seats and more dates to choose from. Thanks to the connectivity that we offer through the Hub of the Americas, there's no question that this expanded service will encourage more economic activity, as well as stronger business and trade ties between Curaçao and the rest of the Americas."

According to Curaçao Tourist Bureau (CTB) representative Andre Rojer "these additional flights

will provide tourists from the continent more chances to experience our island. With our sublimely beautiful beaches, picturesque scenery and tropical weather, Curaçao is the perfect destination for the whole family to relax. Undoubtedly, this is an opportunity to exalt the virtues of our country brand."

Copa currently operates an average of 350 daily flights through the Hub of the Americas, founded in 1992 and located at the Tocumen International Airport. Thanks to its extensive network of routes Tocumen is considered the airport with the most international destinations in Latin America.

In addition, Copa was recognised in the past five years by FlightStats as "The most on-time airline in Latin America", and by the Official Airline Guide of London as "The fourth most on-time airline in the world" and the "most on-time in Latin America."

Advisory Board tackles wide range of subjects

ST. EUSTATIUS—During its fifth meeting, held Wednesday at Gertrude Judson Bicentennial Public Library, the St. Eustatius Community Advisory Board made a list of all the topics discussed and the measures to be taken.

The Board discussed miscellaneous subjects, such as improvement of the notary services on the island, preparation for the hurricane season and disaster management. The problems with car wrecks, roaming animals and the Coralita vine were also discussed, as well as undivided properties and police enforcement. In all these matters the Board made suggestions on how to deal with these topics.

Government Commissioners Mike Franco and Mervyn Stegers said they would "certainly incorporate" the suggestions and advice in policymaking.

During its next meeting, the Advisory Board will discuss improvements in Statia's infrastructure. A date for this meeting still needs to be set.

