

# CLEAR

JETBLUE AIRWAYS LANDS ITS FIRST-EVER  
PILOT TRAINING FACILITY IN ORLANDO

# VIZ

By C.S. White

»» Since its startup in 1999, JetBlue Airways has steadily climbed to become one of the nation's leading — not to mention profitable — low-fare airlines, all while many of its fellow airlines are navigating through turbulent times. Through a unique management approach piloted by maverick founder David Neelman, the airline's customer-centric service, unique in-flight features and low fares have made it a favorite choice. So much so that demand and growth required the company, which has been conducting its flight simulation training out of Miami at Airbus North America's facility, to look to new horizons for a training facility to call its own. Orlando is that choice.

"With the number of planes in our fleet, pilots needing recurrent training, and the purchase of E190s, it made sense for us to get our own facility," says Mike Barger, chief learning officer for JetBlue University, which conducts all aspects of the airline's training.

Indeed it does.

JetBlue currently operates a fleet of 58 Airbus A320 aircraft serving 27 cities (including Orlando), with plans for up to a fleet total of 203. The airline recently placed an order for up to 200 EMBRAER 190 aircraft. The first E190 is scheduled for delivery in mid-2005.

Furthermore, by 2005, when the new facility is scheduled to take off,

JetBlue University expects to annually process 440 new-hire pilots, upgrade 220 pilots and conduct recurrent training for roughly 1,500 pilots (nearly double the number it was processing at the time of this writing).

"Orlando is a natural fit for our needs," continues Barger. "Among other things, it has great weather, things for our students to do while they're here in training, a cooperative business climate, and land."

## MAKING THE GRADE

'Among other things' includes Orlando's reputation as the simulation and training capital of the world. Metro

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID WILLIAMS





Orlando is home to the greatest concentration of modeling, simulation and training companies in the world, including more than 100 companies accounting for 16,800 direct/indirect jobs. Or, in short, quite a talent pool from which JetBlue can pull in the future.

That means something to JetBlue, considering that the new 80,000-square-foot training center will ultimately be running 16 Level D, full-flight simulators. (To fully appreciate their value, both monetarily and intrinsically, each Level D sim is a \$10-million machine that perfectly emulates the environment of an aircraft from feel to sound, allowing pilots to virtually learn everything they need to know before getting into the actual aircraft.)

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JETBLUE AIRWAYS



**“The wealth of simulation and modeling training expertise and technology in the area played a role in JetBlue’s [choice]. ... We couldn’t be in a better place.” — Paul Proffett**

“Because of my background in sim strategies, I knew Orlando was a city where we would continue to grow, and be able to build and cultivate relationships with the local technology industry,” says Barger.

Paul Proffett, director of flight for JetBlue University, concurs. “The wealth of simulation and modeling training expertise and technology in the area played a role in JetBlue’s [choice]. We’ll bring most of our crew in to continue the operation, but the sim maintenance end will be hired from available resources. And, as we grow, we’ll be looking for instructors from the area. We couldn’t be in a better place.”

Orlando’s quality of life was never far from view either. Adds Barger, “Our pilots train for seven weeks. If you have to go away from home for an extended period of time, it’s hard to argue whether you would rather be in Buffalo or Orlando. South Florida is okay, but crowded and, from a culture and entertainment perspective, there’s only the beach. Central Florida is a fully developed recreational area.”

## MAKING THE CHOICE

Orlando was one of at least four serious options on JetBlue’s radar when screening for a home for the facility. Request for proposals went out to the airline’s home base in New York City, to land-wealthy Upstate New York and to Ft. Lauderdale, which already had a JetBlue Airways pilot base and arrivals department in place.

Barger recounts part of the Orlando vetting process.

“As this was coming together, we happened to be

‘anonymous’ company to meet with the University of Central Florida and several simulator companies to see what they had to say.”

National Center for Simulation Executive Director Russ Hauck, who organized the half-day tour of companies, clearly recalls the circumstances leading up to JetBlue’s visit.

“I received a call from the folks at the EDC [Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission] saying they were bringing in a group of people they wanted briefed on the Central Florida Research Park, but ‘we can’t tell you who they are or where they’re from.’”

The directive: give them a feel for the depth, range and expanse of the technology and capability of the companies that could be a resource to them.

Hauck proceeded to set up tours with companies that included **Science Applications International Corp.**, developer of training and sim solution software; **Evans & Sutherland**, maker of visual simulation technology; and the **University of Central Florida Institute**

**for Simulation & Training**, a modeling and sim technology research institute.

“We have a great group of flexible people here that will go with the flow on something like this,” explains Hauck. “Our companies are used to working with the military, so there is a



cooperative business spirit to follow through and get the job done.”

It didn’t go unnoticed, he says. Later, when JetBlue announced its decision, a comment was made to Hauck that one of the things that struck the company was that when considering other locations, it had tried to reach out to local academic institutions, but had difficulty getting them to respond — unlike its experience with Orlando.

“We expect to build relationships [internships and outsourcing] with local education systems like UCF,” says Proffett. “Our tech base is in learning and Orlando’s is in development.

installing our LiveTV entertainment system in our planes at the Orlando Magic hangar we temporarily leased at Orlando International Airport. As we did further research, it became obvious that GOAA [Greater Orlando Aviation Authority] was a forward thinking, open-minded group with its real estate development and that we could construct a new facility on GOAA land. All the planets lined up and it seemed like a good fit in every way.


“As part of the process,” continues Barger, “a little over a year ago we swept through Orlando with our sunglasses and mustaches on as an

Orlando has a reputation for being on the leading edge in this area.”

“Everyone was awesome, from both the culture and tech components — refreshingly so,” says Barger. “When sitting at the table with EDC and GOAA, there was an honest willingness to see how we could make this work.”

In addition to UCF, EDC and GOAA, other people and organizations that helped take JetBlue’s commitment to Central Florida to a new level included Florida Governor Jeb Bush, City of Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, Orange County Chairman Rich Crotty, Enterprise Florida and Valencia Community College.

Even after the deal was cinched, the spirit of cooperation continues, says an impressed Proffett. “There aren’t too many days that go by when we don’t hear from Central Florida tech companies. They have heard we are opening the facility and want to know what they can do to be a part of it.”

Clearly, Orlando is a natural fit. 

## JetBlue U, Orlando

JetBlue University’s new training center will encompass an 80,000-square-foot building. Initial capacity will include eight flight simulators and two cabin simulators, plus classrooms, cabin crew training equipment, a training pool, a fire-fighting training station and administration areas. JetBlue will use this new facility for the initial and continuous training of all JetBlue pilots and in-flight crew, plus support training for its technical operations and customer service crew. Plans also call for on-property amenities such as a full-service hotel to house students, a gas station/mini-mart facility, and both a sit-down and a fast-food restaurant. Construction of the training center is scheduled for completion in late 2005.

The new facilities, which will cover a total of 150,000 square feet, are expected to require a capital investment of up to \$160 million and to create more than 150 jobs in Orlando.

JetBlue University was founded in 2002 to conduct all aspects of the organization’s training, from pilots and in-flight crew to technical operations and customer service.



## The Model City for MS&T

Metro Orlando has long been recognized as the nation’s epicenter for modeling, simulation and training (MS&T) technology. From its roots in military training, this industry has evolved over the past 40 years to provide invaluable applications in such diverse fields as aerospace, medical, emergency services, transportation,

education and entertainment. More than 100 MS&T companies are located in Metro Orlando, contributing to more than 16,500 jobs and an estimated \$1.3 billion in annual revenue in the community.

The Naval Training Systems Center, now known as NAVAIR-TSD, and the Army’s PEOSTRI form the core of the MS&T sector in Metro Orlando. These organizations, along with programs managed by the Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard, represent the headquarters for the U.S. government’s purchasing and operational support for its simulation and training needs, and attract a great number of associated vendors to the region.

Backing Metro Orlando’s MS&T industry are a number of renowned research, support and educational facilities, including the National Center for Simulation, the University of Central Florida Institute for Simulation and Training, and Embry Riddle Aeronautical University’s aviation simulation programs. Metro Orlando’s strong MS&T standing has earned the region the distinction of being designated a National Center of Excellence for Simulation and Training.

Metro Orlando has more than 20 fully accredited institutions of higher learning, which place approximately 85 percent of graduates into the local workforce. The University of Central Florida (UCF), a key contributor to the quality of the employee pool in this region, is one of the few universities in the country to offer both masters and doctoral level MS&T programs. Over the past year alone, UCF has conferred 3,000 undergraduate, masters and doctoral degrees in disciplines related to MS&T, including computer science, psychology (clinical and industrial/organizational), engineering, mathematics and physics. As a result, Metro Orlando’s MS&T businesses have access to a continual “brain trust” of individuals pursuing breakthrough progress in the field.

The extensive resources and expertise available in Metro Orlando, through the convergence of prominent MS&T organizations, reinforce the region’s position as an unmatched locale for new and expanding companies within the industry.

## Becoming Part of Our Tech Landscape

Metro Orlando offers attractive incentives to qualified relocating and expanding companies. This assistance is based on each organization’s particular needs, including, but not limited to:

» Job creation    » Wage levels    » Capital investments

For more information, visit the “Data Center/Incentives” section of the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission’s Web site at [www.OrlandoEDC.com](http://www.OrlandoEDC.com), which provides a general overview of incentives offered to high tech companies located in the area.