



The Charlotte Observer

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2003

www.charlotte.com

C D E F • Price varies by county | 50¢

PART THREE OF FOUR ARE THE PLANES WE FLY MORE AT RISK?

Airline trends worry mechanics

Workers cite less time with planes, cutbacks, pressure to ignore problems

BY AMES ALEXANDER AND TED REED
Staff Writers

It was the kind of safety problem airline mechanics say they're paid to find.

But when United Airlines mechanic George Gulliford reported a crack in the frame of a Boeing 737 jet, he got in trouble.

"You are an Avionics Mechanic and therefore wouldn't normally be tasked with viewing cracks located on frame locations outside of your work area," reads a June 18, 2001, letter to Gulliford from supervisors.

"...This practice will no longer be tolerated or acceptable."

United told The Observer it requires all employees to report any safety concerns and denies it discriminated against Gulliford.

But June 2001 was a time of intense labor-management conflict at the airline, and tension in the hangar was high.

As airlines struggle financially, friction between managers and mechanics is becoming increasingly common, mechanics say.

More than 20 mechanics interviewed by The Observer expressed frustration about cost-cutting they say makes it harder for airlines to maintain their planes properly.

Most also say they're troubled by the industry's push to turn over more maintenance to less-trained mechanics at contract repair stations.

Sanford Tanenbaum, a longtime US Airways mechanic based in Charlotte, said he's concerned about industry-wide cutbacks.

"You can't keep cutting back and cutting back," he said. "You can't keep depending on your luck."

SEE SAFETY | 8A

White takes the lead to chair CMS board

Former City Council member appears likely to be elected tonight

Backers cite experience, coalition building, but votes still could shift

BY CELESTE SMITH
Staff Writer

Newcomer Joe White appears to be the leading contender to become Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board chairperson tonight

— although several board members say allegiances could shift right up to voting time.

Some board members say White, who is leaving the Charlotte City Council after two two-year terms, is a well-known Charlotte figure who can help bring the board together by forging coalitions. He has said



White

since being elected last month that he wants the top post.

He also is a retired educator with 35 years experience — most of it in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. White has said that will give him an insider's understanding of how the district works. He still carries the nickname "Coach" from his days as a football coach at North Mecklenburg High, and head coach and athletic director at Olympic High

As the board's most visible

post, the chairperson sets the tone for how the board conducts its business. The chair also assumes critical public roles, from convincing county officials that they should allocate more school funds to persuading the public to approve construction bonds that ultimately raise taxes.

"This is the first time that I recall that we didn't know who the chair is going to be at this late stage in the game," said George

SEE SCHOOLS | 11A

Long lines for vaccine



T. ORTEGA GAINES — STAFF PHOTOS

People stand in line for flu shots Monday afternoon at the Mecklenburg County Health Department. Waits stretched up to two hours at the health department after reports of an early, severe flu season and a shortage of vaccine prompted hundreds to seek the shot.

Flu news alarms parents

Virus may have caused death of S.C. boy, 6

BY KAREN GARLOCH
Staff Writer

Panicked parents descended on doctors' offices and health departments in the Carolinas Monday to get flu shots for their children before supplies run out.

"Our phones are ringing off the hook, and parents are really frantic," said Dr. Wilma Downing of Southlake Pediatrics in Huntersville.

Lines wound around the hallways at the Mecklenburg County Health Department, with waits of up to two hours, as parents responded to an early and nasty flu season.

Some said they were reacting to news that a York County, S.C., 6-year-old may have died of the flu, that this year's virulent flu

strain has caused child deaths in the West, and that national vaccine manufacturers have sold all the doses they made.

"I'm just a little panicked," said Susan Thomas, who stood in line with her 16-year-old daughter, Stella, at the health department. "I'd rather be safe than sorry."

York County Coroner Doug McKown said Saturday's death of 6-year-old Nicholas Cole Jackson may be related to the flu. He is waiting for more conclusive test results.

Federal health officials said they've been surprised at the number of children who have developed severe flu complications

SEE VIRUS | 16A

16A | How do a cold and flu differ?



Katie Leslie, captain of US Airways Flight 5481, and Jonathan Gibbs, the first officer, flew the Beech 1900D on six flights and had no problem the day before it crashed.

Crew works frantically, futilely to avert disaster

PART THREE OF FOUR

THE STORY SO FAR: U.S. Airways Flight 5481 is heavily loaded, but the pilots estimate that the weight and balance are within limits. After takeoff, the plane shoots up out of control.

BY ELIZABETH LELAND
Staff Writer

Capt. Katie Leslie struggled to bring down the nose of the airplane, but still it shot upward.

It climbed as steeply as a plane in a stunt show.

"You got it?" Leslie asked.

First Officer Jonathan Gibbs cursed.

"Push down," he said, and cursed again.

The landing gear warning horn sounded, a single low-pitch note:

ENNH....

For a moment, the only sounds from Leslie and Gibbs on the cockpit recorder were breathing and grunting as they tried to force the steering yoke forward.

"You," Leslie began, "Uh..."

The stall warning horn blared, drowning out her voice with a loud high-pitch tone, as if someone were leaning on a car horn:

BEEEEEEEE....

"Push the nose down," she shouted. SEE FLIGHT 5481 | 8A



Casey Strickland, 10, gets her flu shot from nurse Linda Sullivan at the health department Monday.

Expect to pay more for carton of eggs

Season, popular diets, declining supply play role in higher prices

BY KATHLEEN PURVIS
Food Editor

Are you feeling a shock when you reach for a carton of eggs? You're not cracking up: It's sticker shock.

Higher demand during the heavy holiday baking season usually means you shell out more for eggs in November and December. But this year, you can add several other factors:

Bird diseases in several states and demands for improvements in the cage sizes for chickens have cut into the size of flocks, decreasing supply. And high-protein diets and increased acceptance of eggs in a healthy diet have increased demand.

That adds up to wholesalers scrambling for eggs. The wholesale price for Grade A eggs in New York, one of the benchmarks used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, was \$1.25 a dozen in November, compared with 84 cents at the same time last year.

"That's the highest it's ever been," says Wayne Clapper of the Egg Clearinghouse in New Hampshire, a commodities broker for the egg industry.

SEE EGGS | 10A

Rising Cost

Higher demand and tighter supply have led to whopping egg prices. Below are prices of a dozen large eggs:

Local Harris Teeter this time last year	\$1.35
Local Harris Teeter this week	\$1.79
Current price at Food Lion	\$1.85



SOURCE: Economic Research Service STAFF

Weather

SEASONAL: High: 57. Low: 29. Increasing clouds after a chilly morning. Full forecast, 8B

Index

Annie's Mailbox...7E
Business.....1D
Classified7C

Comics.....6E
Contact Us.....2A
Editorial14A

Entertainment 4E
Horoscope.....7E
Living.....1E

Local.....1B
Movies.....4E
Obituaries5B

Outfront5E
Sports.....1C
TV5E

This newspaper is printed in part on recycled paper and is recyclable.

83520543218

>KNIGHT RIDDER<