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Maximizing maintenance



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Empire Aerospace has nearly doubled its workforce over the last few years, and now is looking to hire a significant number of additional mechanics and technicians

Empire also does a significant amount of maintenance work on ATR42/72 aircraft, both on 13 ATRs in service with sister company Empire Airlines and for outside customers, such as Canadian regionals Calm Air and West Wind Aviation. It also has done considerable Saab 340 work in the past. Right now, Empire is not seeking to work on new airframe types — waiting to decide whether it will be expanding facilities in 2013.

The company continues to weigh a doubling of its hangar space, but hasn't made a final decision yet, according to Empire General Manager Jim Culora. He expects a decision to be made in the first quarter of 2013. If it were a go-ahead, the hangar would be ready in about nine or ten months.

More immediately, Empire is looking to expand its backshops, including its composite area. It also plans to put some bigger off-wing structural jobs in a more specialized workspace. "Some of the backshop space is under-utilized, so there is some potential for growth there," Culora adds. Empire also is moving into doing some manufacturing processes for government programs, allowing the company to become a vendor or sub-vendor for some aerospace manufacturing.

With work it has added over the last few years, Empire has practically doubled its workforce (nearly 135 employees today), and now is looking to hire a significant number of additional mechanics and technicians based on its expected volume in 2013. It's not easy, Culora admits, being so close to heavy employer Boeing. Empire currently has openings for 8-10 lead mechanics and 47 direct technicians.

Empire also is working on the possibility of implementing some "lean" program techniques, including involving employees to help improve processes, operations and productivity. Working with a consulting firm, Empire is in the evaluation phase. Culora tells *RH* he sees a great potential to streamline work package management, accounting and parts purchasing, and to organize equipment. **RH**

The pluses of PMA parts

South Burlington, VT-based Aviatron, Inc is continuing to expand its development and production of Parts Manufacturer Approval (PMA) parts for regional aircraft — including Bombardier CRJs and Dash-8s — that provide significant cost savings to operators.

Because the PMA parts it develops are used for its own consumption, the 33-year-old company offers customers the benefits of using the lower-cost parts in the overhaul and repair of a variety of aircraft systems. It is a specialist on air cycle machines but its PMA parts — more than 100 — also are used in the overhaul and repair of many other systems, including hydraulic pumps; fuel pumps; power generation components; electronic control units; and pneumatic systems, such as bleed air valves, heat exchangers and actuators.

"Our specialty is that we make PMA parts for our own use, so we can control our costs and turnaround times," says Aviatron President Hans Krause, allowing the company to offer carriers fixed pricing.

An FAA- and EASA-approved repair station, Aviatron operates from a 16,000-square-foot facility at Burlington International Airport with 25 employees and will be hiring about five more, Krause notes.

"We want to keep turn times the same. The reason we're as good as we are is we have flexibility," says Krause. "If a customer needs a part back in 15 days, we can do that. Big companies can't do that." He cites the 'elephant theory': "They're big, but they can't dance."

Aviatron's customers include one of the largest US regionals, as well as smaller airlines, and continues to look for more, says Krause. It is also looking into expanding into larger aircraft. "We're still going where the regionals are going," he adds.