



Life on the Dry Side

By George Murdock

Discovering the friendly skies

It's doubtful I will ever have a corporate jet at my disposal. But now that SeaPort is flying in and out of Pendleton, I can at least get a taste of what they are like.

Although the interior lacks a few amenities corporate executives enjoy in their cabins, the plane is roomy enough, the seats are comfortable, and the plane itself is quite a piece of work.

And while the employees are working out a few bugs that come with any startup, they're doing so with the same kind of spirit and inclusiveness that used to characterize Horizon when it began serving this area 25 years ago.

In those days, Horizon was getting its feet on the ground and there was an employee attitude that permeated the flight experience — right down to those personal ads that used to dot airport walls showing staff members in their youth enroute to a career with the airline industry.

I remember once coming back to Walla Walla covered with salsa. "It was Cinco de Mayo on Horizon," I told my wife, "and we hit an air pocket." Or the days when stewards wore Halloween costumes on Oct. 31 flights. The stories could go on, but somewhere along the line Horizon grew up and became like the rest.

When they were "trying harder" like they used to say with Avis, it was more fun.

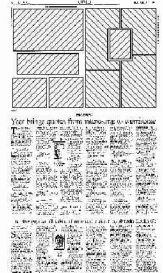
Now, while I certainly want SeaPort to be professional and safe, there's nothing wrong with a little personality and a sense that perhaps the airline and Eastern Oregon can grow up together. We aren't exactly high on everyone's radar screen, so it's nice when a company wants to make our area feel special.

It's been 27 days since SeaPort started serving Pendleton. U.S. Congressman Greg Walden flew into town on the first inbound flight and waxed eloquent about the service.

Several weeks ago, the powers that be suggested perhaps we, as the newspaper, might want to look beyond the observations of a skinny politician and see how SeaPort works for a full-figured passenger.

I was honored to be chosen for the experience in the same way I was honored when they selected me to play Santa Claus for a photo session in our lobby.

Several weeks before my actual flight, I began checking out the schedule options. Since I needed to be in Portland in the morning, the flight that left at 5:45 a.m. was the best option. I don't usually get up at 4:30 a.m. except for the same reason many other folks my age get up briefly in the



middle of the night. But there wasn't another workable choice.

My wife dropped me off at the airport shortly after 5:30 and a few minutes later a couple of young pilots arrived. They asked to see my driver's license and invited me to climb aboard. There were four of us in the plane including the pilots.

I had already gotten dressed at home so I appreciated not having to undress again at the airport in order to pass security. I also appreciated being able to get there a few minutes before departure and still be included among the passengers. In recent months, I had heard tales of people who arrived 45 minutes before a flight and were turned away. But that was before the service change.

The flight to Portland had a few bumps between what was probably Arlington and The Dalles, but otherwise went quite smoothly. The seatbelts are a Swiss invention and it took some doing to figure them out. The fact they fit was comforting. An understanding pilot was quick to provide directions on how best to buckle the belt.

When we arrived in Portland, a Flightcraft van took me directly to the MAX station and within minutes I was downtown. When I came back to the airport, I simply told the information desk in the transportation area my name and that I wanted Flightcraft. A few minutes later the van was back. One hint — have change for the MAX.

I didn't have any luggage with me so that was never an issue. Had I brought along a suitcase, the baggage function would have been just the same as if I had driven up to the Portland airport and gone inside. In my case, I would have had to take the suitcase along with me on the Flightcraft van, checked the bag inside the terminal, and then gone through security. The same would have been true on

a return flight in terms of getting my own bag from baggage claim and bringing in along on the ride back to the Flightcraft Terminal where SeaPort is a tenant.

As it was, I never did go inside Portland International the entire day. Not that it isn't a nice place — I just never had a reason.

Oh, there was a return flight that was as smooth as silk, and the view along the river was wonderful.

When we got back to Pendleton, the terminal was locked but the three passengers and the two pilots found a gate that was unlocked a block or so to the west.

"This is my first day," said one of the young pilots, "so there's a few details we are still working out."

None of the passengers really minded because trying to find a way to escape the tarmac added a little adventure to the experience and besides, we're all about the pioneer spirit in this part of the world.

Will I fly again?

You bet.

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**I REMEMBER ONCE
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 COVERED WITH
 SALSA. "IT WAS
 CINCO DE MAYO ON
 HORIZON," I TOLD
 MY WIFE, "AND WE
 HIT AN AIR POCKET."**