



The next frontier

Former shuttle employees shift expertise to new programs

By Ed Memi

Letting go was a challenge for Joel Dodds, who spent 21 years on Boeing space programs. When NASA's effort to return to the moon by 2020 was canceled, however, he seized the opportunity to expand his experience by becoming a 787 engineer for Commercial Airplanes.

The opportunity came 18 months ago when Dodds volunteered for a 90-day special assignment working on system integration in Everett, Wash. That temporary position evolved into permanent work.

"Some aspects of the job are completely different from my work with NASA, which was a services contract requiring daily contact with our customer," Dodds said. "While direct customer interface is no longer part of my daily routine, I continue to use the basic engineering and integration processes I learned in Boeing Defense, Space & Security."

Dodds is one of about 1,600 Space Exploration employees in 2009 who sought new opportunities within Boeing resulting from the conclusion of the shuttle program, which was announced in 2004.

"We've been working for some time to help employees find employment within the company," said Ludwig Campos, a Space Exploration Human Resources manager. "A significant number of shuttle employees found positions elsewhere in the company. Others were retained for space programs, including the commercial crew program."

Campos said employees need to consider all possible options when faced with downsizing and be flexible enough to translate their skill sets to new job challenges.

"Everyone benefits when highly skilled employees are retained within the company," he said. "It's a win-win, as employees build new work experience and growing programs gain employees familiar with Boeing processes and tools. And, in our case, the unique skill set related to space remains accessible for future pursuits."

Dodds advises employees who are in a program that's winding down to work with their managers. "They can help craft your resume and make you more attractive to other business units and programs. Also, seize opportunities. Don't be afraid to take temporary positions in other parts of the company."

Like Dodds, Neal VanScyoc is a longtime Boeing employee who spent the majority of his career on the shuttle program. Before transferring to the 787 program last February, VanScyoc supported payload processing for space shuttle flights, working on more than 100 launches. Today, he's a Manufacturing Engineer manager on 787 Mid Body and Aft Body fuselages in North Charleston, S.C.

The transition presented a few challenges, VanScyoc said. "NASA spacecraft are typically highly specialized. We often developed processes and equipment designed to achieve one-time technical objectives. In commercial aircraft, we emphasize repeatability and standardization over multiple line units, getting better each time we do it."

VanScyoc agreed that employees need to be open to new opportunities. "I've learned to develop new skills, such as using Boeing's production systems and applying principles of manufacturing," he said. "That was not my comfort zone, but I've come out the other side a much more informed and qualified individual."

Before joining the Tanker KC-46A team last December, Doug Cline was the vehicle manager for Space Shuttle Endeavour. He's now the equipment manager for the aerial tanker's center-line drogue.

The adjustment has gone smoothly, Cline said.

"There's a lot of similarity of working for the U.S. Air Force versus NASA," he said. "Workwise, it is very similar, and you deal with a lot of the same types of issues such as vibration loads, aerodynamics, hazardous fluids, contamination, and writing requirements for performance and verification."

Cline's advice to employees facing downsizing situations: "Keep looking forward. This is an aerospace company, not just a space, commercial or military aircraft company. There are lots of different things to do." ■

susan.h.wells@boeing.com

PHOTOS: (Clockwise from top left) Neal VanScyoc, left, discusses 787 Aft Body tooling requirements with tooling engineer Rob Rader. ALAN MARTS/BOEING Joel Dodds, from left, reviews 787-8 certification planning with Dale Catlett and Mark Stanton. GAIL HANUSA/BOEING Doug Cline stands by the 767 International Tanker on the flight line in Wichita, Kan. BEVERLY NOWAK/BOEING