

# Team Member Spotlight: Director of Pilot Training - Lance Lau



The month of May is Asian American & Pacific Islander heritage month, and we're taking the opportunity to share some of the incredible stories from the standout members of our diverse team. This week we're featuring Director of Pilot Training – Lance Lau. His lifelong career in aviation has taken him all over the world, put him in the seat next to some of the most interesting figures in the industry, and established some exciting 'firsts' for Asian American pilots. Read on to learn some of Lance's story...



## Tell us about your role and what you do at CommutAir.

I am the Director of Pilot Training - After a 40-year career in aviation, I felt that it was now time to “give back” to an industry that has taken care of me and my family. My goal is now to help build the foundation for future aviators by making the training at CommutAir the best in the industry.

## What was it that first interested you in aviation?

I have had a love of flight since I was a child that started with my father. Although he graduated at the top of his Officer Candidate School (OCS) class during WWII, he was not allowed to fly because of his Asian ancestry. Despite this - He accepted his assignment and worked hard throughout his military career to be the best Army Air Corp officer possible, and even posthumously received the Congressional Gold Medal for contributions to the war effort 76 years after the end of WWII.

When I decided to pursue aviation as a career, he advised against it and said, “They don’t let us do things like that.” I was undeterred and made a commitment to succeed or die trying.

In 1984, I was hired at the original Frontier Airlines as the first Asian pilot on the seniority list and often flew with Captain Bob Ashby – one of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen. I felt it was significant that the first Asian American pilot was flying with the first African American pilot at the airline.

## Tell us a little about your professional past.

After the merger of Frontier and Continental Airlines, I was eventually allowed to become part of the Continental training department. After being certified as a SIM instructor and Line Check Pilot, I was named the first Asian Examiner on the Boeing 737 at Continental Airlines - Each jet requires a special type-rating to fly, and Examiners are the select group authorized by the FAA to grant those licenses on their behalf at the airline. Upon merging with United Airlines, I noticed that there was a great amount of diversity at United. My knowledge of international operations was quickly identified, and I was invited to join the Boeing 777 training group. Eventually I retired from United Airlines as a Boeing 777 Examiner. I was offered the opportunity to be part of the leadership team at CommutAir and was humbled to come out of retirement for such an important position.

## Is there a specific moment that influenced you or helped shape your career?

I learned a lot about diversity and the effects of prejudice from both my father and Captain Ashby. When I asked Captain Ashby about the Tuskegee Airmen Scholarship Foundation, “Are they focused on supporting primarily Black children?” He said, “No - We faced discrimination, and we don’t want to do to others what was done to us. We accept all people.” I also learned

the importance of ethics and integrity in the face of adversity from them, as well as the importance of preventing discrimination of any kind to perpetuate.



Upon meeting and having dinner with one of my aviation mentors, Gordon Bethune (then CEO of Continental Airlines), I learned the importance of working hard and treating everyone with dignity and respect...as well as how easy it is to do so if you try!

### **What's your experience in aviation as a person with AAPI heritage?**

The breakthroughs in aviation with regards to diversity were not that long ago. As a minority pilot, I was constantly in a fishbowl - others were always watching closely to see if they could catch me making a mistake. I was permanently on guard to not make any for fear that I would be the example for why Asians should not be allowed to fly.

Many of us have worked hard to blaze this trail, as we come to the end of our career, we encourage you to continue to work towards a day when people are not judged on the color of their skin but the content of their character.

### **What career advice would you give to future aviators?**

It is a great career; it is very important to work hard and understand the importance of what you do. There will be times when you want to give up and quit but keep moving forward and it will be worth the effort. As we continue toward the future, I see more pilots of all backgrounds, working together in aviation. So - go out, work hard, be a considerate person and have as much fun as possible!



*Lance at CommutAir with his son Kalani and daughter Koiula*