

Bellanca, tied to both Hawaiian and Alaska, is retiring as she prepares for a new role

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Key Takeaways

- The Bellanca CH-300 Pacemaker, first flown on Oct. 6, 1929, for the company that became Hawaiian Airlines, is being retired from active flying.
- The classic single-engine aircraft belonged to the fleets of both Hawaiian Airlines and Alaska Airlines during their earliest days.
- Her history will continue to be told in a permanent exhibit for employees, locals and visitors to enjoy — details to come.

Our Bellanca CH-300 Pacemaker will be formally retired from employee 'ohana tours as we prepare her for a new exhibit that the community and visitors can enjoy — a living testimonial in an accessible location.

The Bellanca, which launched service in Honolulu on Oct. 6, 1929, is tied to the histories of both Hawaiian and Alaska. As the first aircraft in Inter-Island Airways' fleet, she supported sightseeing tours in Hawai'i for the airline that would become Hawaiian Airlines. Later, she enabled cargo hauls for Star Air Lines (later Alaska Airlines) in the state of Alaska to deliver supplies to remote communities and more. The aircraft was sold in 1949 and eventually grounded in 2000 before being acquired by an aviation enthusiast in Oregon. Having Bellanca back with Hawaiian since 2009 has been a heartwarming homecoming — an effort led by former CEO **Mark Dunkerley**, a pilot who flew many of the employee 'ohana sightseeing flights on the Bellanca. Reached in London for this announcement, he reflected on her reintroduction to the fleet:

“Hawaiian Airlines is a company that embraces its sense of place and its history, and there is no more tangible example of its history than the Bellanca,” he said. “It has been an enormous privilege to fly so many employees and their families. I don’t have one favorite moment, but a collection: They’re all to do with the expressions and statements made by our employees and their families as they’ve had the opportunity to fly in a 90-year-old airplane and see their island home in incredible ways.”

“The Bellanca is part of Hawaiian Airlines’ story as well as Alaska Airlines’ story, and more: she represents the dawn of aviation in Hawai‘i,” said Community and Cultural Relations Director **Debbie Nakanelua-Richards**. “That’s a story that will continue to be shared with everyone who visits Hawai‘i or calls Hawai‘i home.”

About our Bellanca CH-300 Pacemaker

- Tail number NC251M
- Overall length: 27 ft. 9 in. / 8.46 meters
- Wingspan: 46 ft. 4 in. / 14.12 meters
- Steel-and-wood frame wrapped by Dacron fabric
- Restored vintage Wasp engine by Pratt & Whitney
- Average speed 91 mph; max speed 165 mph
- First inducted into service: Oct. 6, 1929

Photo timeline



Our first aircraft: The Bellanca | The Bellanca CH-300 Pacemaker launched isle businessman Stanley C. Kennedy's vision to replace ships with planes as Hawai'i's primary mode of interisland transportation. On Oct. 6, 1929, several sightseeing flights were launched aboard Bellanca around O'ahu as a trial for commercial operations. It successfully carried 76 passengers that day and sparked enough curiosity among locals and visitors to convince the Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company board to expand its footprint into aviation.



Inter-Island Airways inaugurated | One month later, on Nov. 11, 1929, Inter-Island Airways was inaugurated, and sightseeing tours took off with the Bellanca logging nearly 50 flight hours that month. (In 1941, Inter-Island Airways changed its name to Hawaiian Airlines to pave the way for transpacific operations.



Stanley C. Kennedy, founder of Inter-Island Airways, 1929 | "For the present our aim is to handle and to increase business between Honolulu and the five islands of Kaua'i, Lāna'i, Moloka'i, Maui, Hawai'i; afterward to extend our services to other ports as opportunity offers and business requires, and also to make sight-seeing and special trips. At last, through our affiliation with the Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company, we shall have a complete system on the water and in the air, steamers and



Bellanca in Alaska | The aircraft made its way to Alaska to be among the first aircraft in the fleet for Star Air Lines, which later became Alaska Airlines. It would haul cargo — such as 55-gallon drums of fuel — deliver supplies to villages, transport injured minors and double as a seaplane. Alaska sold the Bellanca in 1949, and she was eventually grounded in 2000 and acquired by an aviation enthusiast in Oregon.

airplanes supplementing each other, to the end that the islands shall have a service second to none." — from "Aviation for Hawai'i" by Stanley C. Kennedy, 1929. The Bellanca gave more than 12,000 guests – six at a time – a birds-eye-view of O'ahu for \$3 per person (nearly \$60 in today's dollars), until she was sold in 1933.



Brad Tilden and Mark Dunkerley flying the Bellanca, 2017. | *"This was the first airplane that Hawaiian carried customers in, and one of the first airplanes that Alaska carried customers in," Tilden said. "I could not have been more honored to fly the airplane alongside Mark."*



Alaska Airlines CEO Brad Tilden and Hawaiian Airlines CEO Mark Dunkerley, 2017. | *Hawaiian Airlines brought her home in 2009 and initiated an ambitious restoration project to return the plane to flying condition for the company's 80th anniversary. For several years, Bellanca was operated for employee and community flights under the caretaking direction of Capt. Merle Clawson, and occasionally piloted by former Hawaiian Airlines CEO Mark Dunkerley — including on a breezy trip with Alaska Airlines CEO Brad Tilden in 2017.*



Each year, our Community & Cultural Relations team and Capt. Merle Clawson would celebrate Bellanca's birthday on October 6 — this was her 95th anniversary.



CEO Mark Dunkerley, Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the Bellanca | *CEO Mark Dunkerley flew Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the Bellanca in 2012.*



A hui hou, Bellanca! While our Bellanca CH-300 Pacemaker will be formally retired from employee 'ohana tours, she will soon debut in a new exhibit that the community, visitors and employees can enjoy.



As we kicked off Hawaiian's 95th year of service in 2024, we operated one of the last trips aboard Bellanca — a special flight for Ben Lee. In Dec. 1929, then 11-month-old Lee became Hawai'i's youngest airline passenger as we introduced interisland air service to the Islands. Nearly a century later, we welcomed him and his grandson aboard the same Bellanca CH-300 he was photographed with almost 94 years ago.

See the story on You Tube:

<https://youtu.be/MSqV3JTQ190?si=bzG6ZY7s6fWfP7e5>