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NewsRelease

Safety seminar for stakeholders hosted by Princess Juliana Int'l. Airport

MAHO, St. Maarten (Sunday, April 22, 2012)—Princess Juliana International Airport (SXM) is leading the charge for regional airports to adhere to international safety standards. A one-day executive Safety Seminar held at Sonesta Maho Resort on Wednesday focused on the theme, “Growing the Air Transport Business with a Focus on Safety.”

Visiting airport expert Michael Nicolaas urged the gathering of 78 people, including representatives of airports in Nevis, Saba, St. Eustatius, St. Barths, St. Maarten/St. Martin, airline officials, handlers, cleaners, and concessionaires, to “observe the international safety standards ... and follow the recommendations and training from Airports Council International.”

Nicolaas is an airport administration and management specialist with a focus on airport operations, air service development and marketing, and airport security and planning.

During the day-long seminar, Nicolaas stressed key safety tips, including tips about the shipping of dangerous goods, making sure that pilots and air traffic controllers are proficient in many languages to deal with the changing demography of travelers, and avoiding fatigue among airport personnel. He said that it is important for such personnel to get sufficient rest.

On the subject of delays due to volcanic ash for example, Nicolaas noted that it is imperative that airports in the region have contingency plans to deal with these delays so that passengers are always treated with respect and utmost care.

“There should be alternative ways to get passengers to their destination. People must be comfortable always when flying,” said the former managing director of Queen Beatrix International Airport in Aruba.

Nicolaas stressed that airports should focus on creating a safety culture, which should involve all stakeholders in the aviation and airport fields, “from senior officers to the lowest rank.” Added to this, “they must be consistent with what they are doing,” said Nicolaas, who has worked at executive and management (YVRAS) levels for international airports in the Dominican Rep., Colombia, Peru, Canada, Frankfurt, and Zurich.

The SXM manager of Quality Assurance, Anastacio Baker, echoed the sentiments of Nicolaas.

“The aim of the seminar was to ensure that all aviation personnel remain abreast with changes and developments in the industry,” said Baker.

Baker was extremely pleased with the response to the seminar, which he said gained added credibility with the presence of Minister of Tourism and Economic Affairs Franklin Meyers.

“It is important to have these seminars to help everyone remain safety conscious at all times. One of the long-term benefits is being and staying active in the aviation field, because

after awhile, some may become complacent and we have to keep reminding people of the importance of not making a mistake,” said Baker.

“ Mistakes in this business can cost lives. So these trainings are to remind people that they must remain safety conscious at all times. It is our job to continue the education,” said Baker.

According to Baker, SXM extended the invitation to the nearby islands to share safety information. He is looking forward to September’s meeting of the Islands Airport Safety Committee (IASC). Nicolaas, who departed St. Maarten on Thursday afternoon, said that he hopes to return for that audit.

IASC comprises aviation and airport personnel from the islands in the Dutch territories in the Caribbean and Suriname. Baker, one of the founding members, explained that it was established in 2006 after a seminar in Aruba.

“We decided to form a group to keep in contact. Every year, we fly to an island to audit each other’s airport and in September we will all be here,” said the Quality Assurance manager.

While attending an industry seminar in Curacao last January Baker became impressed by Nicolaas’ knowledge of aviation safety. “I was so intrigued by his [Nicolaas’] presentation. I said St. Maarten needed that information. His message (on Wednesday) was extremely clear, exciting and meaningful,” said Baker

Michael Nicolaas has served on the World Governing Board of Airports Council International (ACI) and is a former 1st Vice President of ACI Latin America & Caribbean. He received his educational training at the Civil Aviation Training School - Netherlands Antilles, MIT, and the Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.

Photo caption1:

Michael Nicolaas, focus on airport operations, air service development and marketing, and airport security and planning.

Photo caption2:

Airport and aviation representatives at SXM seminar on “Growing the Air Transport Business with a Focus on Safety.”