

Disponible en anglais seulement

Times & Transcript

Safe flight is one tough task, but Metro's sky captains make it so

Times & Transcript (Moncton)

Fri Oct 23 2015

Page: A11

Section: Opinion

Byline: Cole Hobson

You could be forgiven for not realizing that the Town of Riverview is home to a bustling workplace for air traffic controllers.

Or, for not even realizing what it is that goes on inside the **Nav Canada** area control centre (ACC) located on Old Coach Road.

Truth be told, the large building nestled inside a quiet suburban subdivision in the quiet town is easy to miss, unless you are actually looking for it.

But **Nav Canada** has been in the building since 1980 and once you get beyond the barbed-wire fencing and security gates, you realize just what a massive operation lies inside the heavily-secured doors.

Nav Canada owns and operates Canada's civil air navigation service, managing 18 million square kilometres of Canadian and oceanic airspace. The country is divided into seven flight information regions, and the Moncton one includes the ACC in Riverview as well as facilities in Halifax, Saint John, Charlottetown, Fredericton and Iqaluit.

Air traffic controllers co-ordinate and control flights in and out of Maritime airports from the Riverview ACC, as well as guiding planes travelling from the eastern seaboard to Europe and back, using a variety of sophisticated technology.

And for those who may still be scratching your heads in confusion - no, air traffic controllers are not the people on airport runways waving the batons and directing traffic that way. That's a still vital, but unrelated, profession.

Air traffic controllers are the people who are holed up in front of radar screens, conversing with pilots as they go from point A to point B, ensuring they arrive at their destination safely and travel in their own airspace, well clear of any other traffic and in accordance with a multitude of rules.

They are also the people in airport towers who are helping pilots safely land and takeoff their planes and keeping the runways and airports orderly.

Nav Canada is looking to add new employees in the region and I toured the Riverview facility for a story last week. During my tour I got a fascinating first-hand look at what does in fact go on in the life of an air traffic controller.

The amount of technology and expertise in the building is staggering. These are people who have an encyclopedic knowledge of aviation and the safety rules that surround it. And they rely on that knowledge to make decisions each day to keep thousands of air passengers safe.

Hearing air traffic controllers converse with pilots doesn't even sound like English a lot of the time, but their unique phraseology is designed to convey messages quickly and efficiently.

It can be a high-pressure and high-stress job, especially if you're not "wired" for it. Wayne Nyman, general manager of the Moncton Flight Information Region, explained to me that it takes a certain type of person to be able to handle the duties of an air traffic controller.

Any statistics will show you that air travel is much safer than driving - you have a much better chance of getting in an accident driving to the airport than you do once you are inside the plane. But still, many people have a reservation or fear of flying.

I'm not in any way a nervous flier and I think I'll be even more at ease now that I've gotten a glimpse at the inside of an area control centre.

People in our community can also take solace in the fact that the training and testing process at this company is extremely rigid and difficult, with safety being the ultimate concern. The training itself can last over two years - part of it unpaid - with a lot of theory and simulation, as well as on-the-job experience with a trained air traffic controller watching. That's all before a trainee is ever given the reigns themselves.

It takes a very specific person to land a job at **Nav Canada** and those who do emerge as new air traffic controllers in our Metro Moncton locations will be the best of the best - highly-trained experts, ready to do professional work to continue to keep our airways safe.

Air traffic controllers are unsung heroes in a sense, as for the most part the work they do goes largely unnoticed. Often people will applaud their pilot when he makes a clean landing after a turbulent flight or in bad weather, without realizing that it was both the pilot and air traffic controller expertise that brought a safe conclusion to the voyage.

Typically you'll only hear of the work of an air traffic controller when tragedy strikes. Their work will be in the spotlight in an extremely rare case of a plane accident, or in the case of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, when air traffic controllers across the continent were tasked with sorting out emergency landings for all planes in airspace.

I had never realized **Nav Canada** had a thriving location right in our backyard until last week, but now - pun intended - they are well on my radar. Pilots are often in the spotlight for the great work they do on the front lines in getting our aircrafts safely to their destinations, but behind the scenes, the work of air traffic controllers in our community deserves much respect and admiration as well.

Cole Hobson hobson.cole@timestranscript.com Cole Hobson is a reporter with the Times & Transcript. His column appears every Friday. Follow him on Twitter: @TTColeHobson. City Views appears weekdays, written by various members of our staff.

Length: 913 words

About Times and Transcript

The Times & Transcript began as the Moncton Weekly Times in 1868. Ever since, the Weekly Times and the Moncton Daily Transcript (founded 1882) have served as the voice of southeastern New Brunswick. The papers merged as The Times & Transcript in 1983 to form a dynamic media company dedicated to the future of the region. Committed to community reporting, The Times & Transcript works to develop close relationships with readers, advertisers, and the local cultural, governmental, non-profit, service and business communities. We build on those relationships to fulfill our commitment to enhancing the future of southeastern New Brunswick.