

significantly, it was the first time they were compensated for the complexity of their work—not just simple traffic counts—while other provisions bound them ever more tightly as partners with the FAA to ensure air safety and boost productivity.

“We had to change the relationship between management and labor in order to meet the challenges,” Garvey says. Acknowledging that some

trust issues still need to be resolved in light of the agency’s difficult history with its controller work force, she adds, “On balance, there are more places where the relationship is more positive than negative.”

The 1998 contract also represented another highlight in the union’s relatively short but noteworthy history.

Earlier in the year, the AFL-CIO granted NATCA a direct charter. The powerful labor organization preferred to consolidate its vast array of affiliates and had reserved this honor for a

mere handful since NATCA was certified. The union cherished the recognition, vindicating the once-tarnished reputation of controllers in the house of organized labor.

Founded on the premise of gaining a voice in

the workplace, NATCA has evolved into what controllers like to think of as a white-collar union that shuns strong-arm tactics. Top officers enjoy regular access to the agency’s administrator—a hard-won victory that finally ensures the union’s issues are clearly communicated to the upper echelon. And while equipment and procedures historically have been implemented with little or no controller input, twenty-nine union liaisons and technical representatives now work full time—virtually all of them at agency headquarters—on about sixty-five projects.

NATCA’s role extends beyond the aviation community and the nation’s borders. Members contribute about \$1 million every election cycle to a Political Action Committee fund—the second-highest average per member of all union PACs—that is passed along to both sides of the aisle on Capitol Hill. * One of its former National Executive Board members serves as deputy president of the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers’ Associations, an influential body that deals with the profession’s issues on a global level. Two other union members serve on IF-ATCA committees.

Taking its charge of organizing the unorganized seriously, NATCA has affiliated nineteen new bargaining units beyond its controller ranks and now represents about 20,000 FAA workers—including engineers and architects, computer specialists, inspectors, nurses, staff support personnel, and others—as well as some controllers in the Defense Department and at towers run by private companies. Seventy-five percent of represented workers are union members (including 82 percent of FAA controllers), an exceedingly high level in the federal sector.

At its core, a thousand or more dedicated



NATCA archives

Signing on the dotted line: NATCA President Michael McNally and FAA Administrator Jane Garvey formally seal the 1998 contract. The agreement marked the first time the union and its employer negotiated wages.

* The ranking is from 1999 figures based on information from the AFL-CIO, Almanac of Federal PACs, Federal Election Commission, and union-sponsored Web sites.