

Lawmakers save aircraft jobs in Dutchess

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Despite recent Albany antics and the resulting fodder for headlines, one Dutchess company is grateful for the bi-partisan effort on its behalf, enabling it to remain in New York.

Associated Aircraft Group, a wholly owned subsidiary of Sikorsky Aircraft in Connecticut, has been berthed in Dutchess County Airport for several years, maintaining its fleet of 10 Sikorsky 876 helicopters and providing jobs for 80 maintenance workers and administrative staff.

AAG's fractional-owned aircraft were exempt from New York's sales and use tax until Albany changed a few words in its new 2009-2010 budget. The sudden loss of the exemption put AAG in a dilemma, since its parent company doesn't pay tax on fractional aircraft ownership in Connecticut.

"We were essentially told the wording of the budget could not be changed," said Tom McQuade, AAG's executive vice president.

It was in Sikorsky's best interest to move AAG out of Dutchess and across the border, but for AAG executives, putting 80 people out of work was not in the equation.

In what McQuade called an incredible bi-partisan effort, "Dutchess's Legislature passed a resolution to keep us in the county; both its chambers, its economic development corporation, Gov. Paterson's regional representative, J.J. Hanson, along with New York state Sens. Steve Saland and Mark Molinaro and Assemblyman Joel Miller, worked to find a way to get us the exemption back after we were told it was useless to try."

The state's Dept. of Taxation and Finance expedited an opinion that fractional aircraft ownership would remain exempt. "Their determination to work together and their loyalty to our company were amazing," McQuade said. "Some really good people came out for this one and made it happen."

McQuade said leaving would have been extremely difficult, particularly because of the employees, the majority local residents, who would join the growing group of unemployed. "The efforts of all these people who crossed party lines and put differences aside to keep these jobs here in Dutchess really humbled and amazed me," said McQuade. "Even our parent company, Sikorsky, was impressed with AAG's relationship here in Dutchess and how hard everyone worked to make it possible for us to stay here."

To thank everyone for their efforts, AAG hosted a party at its hangar at the Wappingers Falls airport, where 200 supporters came to celebrate saving 80 jobs for mechanics and administrative workers. (Photos are in Faces and Places in this issue.)

"With all the dysfunction going on in Albany, and the loss of several hundred jobs here in Dutchess –" NXP Semiconductor's closing and IBM's layoffs "– I can't say enough about the efforts of every single person involved to help us stay and retain these jobs," said McQuade. "We've always worked to be a good corporate citizen to Dutchess. Now, they've reciprocated in the most amazing way, and we're really humbled by everyone's efforts to keep us here."



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