LIFE BEGINS AT 40: AIRBUS HELICOPTERS CELEBRATES FOUR DECADES IN CANADA

News / Manufacturer

Celebrating the 40th anniversary of its presence in Canada, Dwayne Charette, President of Airbus Helicopters in Canada explains why adaptability, customer focus and Airbus' global reach has seen the support offered by the site go from strength to strength – and this is only the beginning. Since opening in 1984, the Airbus Helicopters site in Fort Erie, Canada continues to evolve to address the dynamic helicopter market. "Originally the facility was established as a final assembly line for the Bo105," notes President of Airbus Helicopters in Canada, Dwayne Charette, "but I would say the strength of the facility in Canada is our ability to be flexible and adapt."

During the last 40 years the site has evolved to support a growing in-service fleet and the unique missions that require a "Made in Canada" solution, with the addition of Composite Manufacturing, and Dynamic Component Repair (DCR). Also responsible for in-service support, a continuous and strong focus on the customer has underpinned the successful integration of this diverse portfolio of activity, as Charette explains "it's all about keeping them flying. Our customers fly critical missions, whether it's emergency medical services, airborne law enforcement, the firefighting that's been going on in Western Canada or many others. Our connection and the proximity to the customers

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has ‘fuelled’ our ability to adapt and become what we are today. It’s really about being global but having a local footprint. Which ultimately is all about proximity to the customer.”

Willing and maple

Beyond providing support for 228 Canadian customers who operate over 760 helicopters, Airbus Helicopters in Canada occupies a key role in the company’s supply chain. “Everything that we make for composites, we’re the sole source for Airbus Helicopters’ platforms, worldwide. For Dynamic Component Repair, we are the centre of excellence for the group, for light helicopter single-engine gearboxes. All these different business lines make Airbus Helicopters Canada unique, because it is quite rare to find all these activities in a customer centre.”

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Charette believes they play an important role in ensuring customers have a voice. “When we look at what our customers do here in Canada, not everything we do is different, but there is some uniqueness to it,” he notes. “For example, the geographies of where our customers operate can be very different. So, we’re able to bring the customer’s concerns, their voice, their needs, address what we can, what we can’t, then obviously, we’re able to bring that message back to the group as well.”

One example of responding to a customer requirement was a particular EMS operator who had purchased a number of H145s. Although huge numbers of H145 helicopters fly EMS missions worldwide, not all of them operate in the same temperatures as can be found in the Canadian winter. “Operating in Western Canada, occasionally we needed to improve the heating system that would respond to the -40°C temperatures,” notes Charette. “That was something that we were able to design and do here. We gave that feedback to the group and I know there was at least one other customer in a northern climate who actually ended up purchasing that STC.”

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FACTs and figures

Charette believes there is more to come in the country, which will have an impact on the local site. “On the civil side there, we see significant opportunities for fleet replacement,” he says. “I also think we’re in the best position ever to capture more of the market in the defence realm”. It has recently been announced that the H135 will be the single helicopter for the Royal Canadian Air Force Future Aircrew Training (FAcT) programme. “FAcT will be the first opportunity and then we plan to build from there. These will be the first Airbus helicopters to fly for the Canadian military, which is a huge step. So, we really do see a pathway forward to gain more market share in defence, which is key.”

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