

BY LIZ GOFF

A crew of federal investigators arrived at LaGuardia Airport on July 5. Their mission: to determine how the actions of an air traffic control trainee resulted in a near-collision at one of the nation's busiest airports.

On the morning of July 5, Delta flight 737 from Cincinnati was on its descent to Runway 22/4 at La Guardia. In the control tower a trainee became confused trying to direct aircraft on the ground—one of them a 50-seat Conair Delta connection headed to Greensboro, North Carolina, as the 737 was about to land—and instructed the pilot of the Conair to cross the runway, setting the two planes on a near-catastrophic collision course.

Sources at the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said the trainee was working with an experienced controller as part of a two-man team in the tower on July 5, when the trainee's radar screen "screamed a series of alarms and flashing lights", alerting the more experienced controller that a horrible mistake had been made. "The controller grabbed the equipment and shouted an order to the Conair jet, to hurry across the runway," sources said.

The two planes came within less than 672 feet of each other, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) officials said. Pilots on both planes managed to avert a ground catastrophe—setting into motion action by nearby residents and civic leaders.

Rose Marie Poveromo, president of the United Community Civic Association (UCCA), said her community is aghast to

## LaG Air Traffic Control Trainee Sets Planes On Collision Course

learn that only one experienced air traffic controller was in the tower with the trainee at the time of the incident. Poveromo, whose home is a few hundred feet from a massive fuel farm at La Guardia, described the implications of the near miss as devastating.

"Since the first time I took the microphone as president of UCCA 15 years ago I have said that La Guardia Airport is an accident waiting to happen.

"It's a major jetport built in the middle of a residential community, surrounded by the Buckeye Pipeline and a massive fuel farm.

"It's sad that, had this catastrophe occurred, the fuel farm might have exploded. Such an explosion would have the ability to engulf the entire Astoria Heights/Jackson Heights communities.

"Politicians from all over New York state were shocked and alerted when a terrorist plot was uncovered at Kennedy Airport earlier this year," Poveromo said. "However, these people came late to the party—since we have been saying for 15 years that La Guardia Airport is a disaster waiting to happen.

Sources at the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said the trainee was working with an experienced controller as part of a two-man team in the tower on July 5, when the trainee's radar screen "screamed a series of alarms and flashing lights", alerting the more experienced controller that a horrible mistake had been made.

"There have been other near misses at LaGuardia," Poveromo claimed. "We have cried out for years to the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) to reduce the number of arrivals and departures at LaGuardia Airport."

Poveromo said she was unsure if any elected official heard the cries from her community, pleading with federal officials for a moratorium on any new flights at La Guardia, and for a curfew on flights from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. "Is it too much to ask that the people of Astoria Heights be allowed to sleep at night?" she asked.

Poveromo applauded efforts by Congressman Joseph Crowley to rein in conditions at the airport that concern the community.

Crowley reached out to the nation's top transportation officials in the wake of the July 5 near-collision, stressing the importance of a federal probe into the incident.

Rohit Mahajan, a spokesperson from the congressman's office, said Crowley called U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters on July 20 to stress how important it

is for the federal government to investigate the incident and to take it seriously.

Crowley told Peters he believes air traffic controllers at all U.S. airports are overextended, Mahajan said. "The congressman believes there is a need for more not fewer air traffic controllers", responding to a recent call by FAA officials who are seeking to reduce the number of air traffic controllers at the nation's airports.

"The congressman believes the FAA cuts would lead to numerous reports of other near-collisions on runways, and other issues that would compromise the efficiency of U.S. airports," said Mahajan.

Crowley also called for a freeze or a reduction in the number of flights arriving and departing at La Guardia, Mahajan said. "He is concerned about the growth of La Guardia and the impact airport conditions have on the surrounding community."

"Kudos to Congressman Crowley for addressing a dire concern that the people of Astoria Heights and Jackson Heights live with each and every day," Poveromo said. "It's time that someone took our concerns to the highest level of the federal government."

"The FAA must, in good conscience, add to the number of air traffic controllers at U.S. airports so residents in surrounding communities may have some semblance of security. There must also be true control in the control tower at La Guardia, along with a reduction in the number of planes arriving and departing at what was originally a small municipal airport," Poveromo said.

# LEARN TO DRIVE

• 4 Points Off The License  
• 10% Insurance Discount

5 HOURS CLASSROOM OPEN TO PUBLIC

CARS • BUSES • TRUCKS • TRACTOR TRAILERS • MOTORCYCLES PROVIDED FOR LESSONS & ROAD TESTS



LICENSE A



LICENSE B



LICENSE B-P



LICENSE M

## AUTO INSURANCE

- Any Driver • Any Age • Any Cars—Motorcycles • Low Rates
- Low Down Payments • Immediate ID Cards • Title Duplicate
- Plates & Registration Obtained

## FAST ROAD TEST APPOINTMENTS AVAILABLE

- No Contracts • No Obligation
- Lessons For Beginners & Advanced
- Take Only The Lessons You Need
- Refresher Courses
- Free Driver's Manual
- Private Lessons
- Free Road Test Evaluation
- Patient, College - Trained Instructors
- Lessons: Day, Night, Weekends
- Automatic & Shift

www.ferraridrivingschool.com

**FERRARI**

**DRIVING SCHOOL INC.**

**278-6679**

Astoria C.D.L. Training Center  
35-28 19th Avenue

JACKSON HEIGHTS  
74-02 Broadway

ASTORIA  
32-32 Steinway St.