

MEET THE NEW NNM RVP STEPH WINDER



Stephanie "Steph" Winder took office as the Northwest Mountain Regional Vice President in October. This is her first term on NATCA's National Executive Board. Steph spent her entire air traffic career at Salt Lake City Center (ZLC). She arrived at the facility in 2008, and 10 years later, she was elected ZLC FacRep, a position she held until she took office as RVP.

NATCA's Public Affairs Administrator Jessica Reed sat down with Steph to find out more about her experience as a union leader and what she hopes to accomplish during her term.

How did you first become active in NATCA? What were some of your first roles serving our membership?

I was hired in 2008 and joined NATCA as soon as I arrived at my facility. I didn't know much about NATCA, but my FacRep took us up to the classroom and explained everything. It was during imposed work rules, so we were all in the classroom, we didn't get to go off-site. I was intrigued and could see the benefit of being in a union. I'd had other jobs, and I thought it would be nice to have someone on my side fighting for me. Then, I got pregnant while I was in training, and I went to my FacRep to ask if I would be let go because I was still on probation and in the middle of training. They told me that I couldn't be fired, and they also sat me down and explained how parental leave worked. They told me they would look after me and make sure nothing happened.

Once I was certified, I became a subject-matter expert for ERAM which was, at the time, a new software being rolled out to Centers across the NAS. Salt Lake City Center was one of the first facilities to start using ERAM, and I had an interest in helping other controllers learn about it. I would go around to different Centers across the country to teach the nuances and help them through any issues they had. I did that for three or four years, and then I had an opportunity to become the Scheduling Rep for my area.

After several years as a scheduling representative, in 2015 I got appointed to be OWCP Rep for the Northwest Mountain Region.

In 2018, I felt like there were some things that could be done differently at my facility, so I put my name in the hat and ran for FacRep. It was a three-way race that went into a runoff, and I ended up winning that race. I took office as ZLC FacRep in October 2018.

I continued to stay involved with OWCP throughout my time as FacRep and I became the vice-chair of that committee in 2021. I loved serving in that role because of the work we do on tackling traumatic stress claims. We get to help controllers navigate the ever-challenging mental health field all the way from filing their claim to getting connected to professional services and, eventually, returning to work when they are ready.

In 2023, I decided I wanted to run for Regional Vice President of the Northwest Mountain Region. I started campaigning in January 2024 and ultimately won that election.

What do you hope to accomplish as Northwest Mountain Region VP?

I want to have a region that is serving the Union and can be responsive to member issues. I want to make sure that everyone that wants to be involved has the opportunity to serve the membership, which in turn helps build a stronger union. I think having an informed membership is so powerful at every level. Even if they're not an elected or appointed representative, I want there to be members at every facility that can answer questions and know where to find the right information. My team and I have been fast at work to accomplish this during facility visits, showing members the ins and outs of the MyNATCA website, where they can find copies of our CBAs and resource material online, and what kinds of protections they have that they may not be aware of. It's important that it's not just the FacReps and those in leadership positions that have the information.

Who are some of your female role models in the aviation community?

I went to CTI school in Anchorage to get into air traffic. One of the instructors, Sherri Larue, was so supportive of me and was a huge impact in my success in that program. She eventually hired me as a lab assistant which gave me extra opportunities to be exposed to air traffic and the aviation world.

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I was in telemarketing before this and I also had worked in continuing education for stockbrokers before that. So with virtually no background or experience in aviation, it was really great to have someone like Sherri as a teacher.



What has been the most pivotal or standout moment during your time advocating for NATCA members?

I don't want to get into too many specifics because it's such a sensitive and personal topic, but working on hardship claims has been very meaningful. When you're able to help someone work with the Agency, it's rewarding. I just got an email from a member

that I helped with a hardship transfer, and it was so amazing to hear they were doing well at their new facility. Things like that are really touching because that's what NATCA does and why we have a union.

Similar to that, with OWCP, sometimes you talk to people sometimes on their worst day at work and help them through that process. Letting them just breathe for a minute and know that it's okay to admit that you've been affected by something traumatic at work: that has been really rewarding.

What advice do you have for women who are new to ATC or just learning about our profession?

That's a tough question. It's a super male-dominated field. I'd like to say just stick to your guns and suck it up, but I think the better answer would be to make friends and know that joking around and teasing is more common in our profession than in other industries. I took some of it pretty harshly when I first started in ATC mainly due to the industry I was previously in. There wasn't a lot of sarcasm or humor. It was very serious. I had to learn that when controllers joke with you, they're not being mean. They're viewing you as "part of the club", and that's a good thing. Also, if you are uncomfortable, there are ways to address that such as NATCA's Professional Standards Committee. I'd also definitely say it's important to work hard and know your information because, unfortunately, if you don't, you might be judged and criticized more than your male counterparts. Also, if you have questions, it is okay to ask them.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

I'm really excited for this opportunity as RVP. When I decided I wanted to run, I didn't think that I was going to be the only woman on the current National Executive Board, and one of the three that have ever served on it. My gender wasn't a factor for running. I just had an idea of what the Northwest Mountain looked like for me, and what I could do for our members there. The first couple months have been pretty amazing, and I'm excited for the rest of my term.

