

# Olympic odyssey: Delta carries the flame

The Olympic flame, traveling onboard "The Centennial Spirit," landed safely on U.S. soil early Saturday morning, April 27, thanks to the Olympic efforts of hundreds of Delta people worldwide.

Delta charter flight 9696 carried the flame 7,000 miles on a 14-hour flight from Athens, Greece, to Los Angeles for the official start of the cross-country Olympic Torch Relay.

## Cincinnati: the flight begins

Children's faces reflecting awe and wonder filled "The Centennial Spirit" April 25 at Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport as the aircraft awaited its historic flight to Athens via Frankfurt.

From 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. April 25, Cincinnati-area students toured the aircraft and saw where the torch would rest on its way to the United States. The general public also responded to the invitation, some taking their first glimpse inside a Delta jet.

Media representatives swarmed over the "The Centennial Spirit" in the afternoon, with a local NBC affiliate broadcasting live in front of the aircraft at noon.

Pushing back on-time at 3:55 p.m.,

Ship 812 taxied under water-cannon arches sprayed from CVG fire trucks and took off into the blue Northern Kentucky sky, banking slowly east.

## Athens: Allen credits Delta people

Speaking at Athens' Hellenikon International Airport in the pre-dawn hours, Chairman Ron Allen expressed pride in bringing the flame and the Olympic spirit to North America.

"On behalf of the 60,000 people of Delta Air Lines whose hard work made this possible, we are pleased to share the special feeling of bringing people throughout the world closer together," said Allen.

The flame burned inside a sealed safety lantern fueled by 4.5 fluid ounces of petroleum naphtha, mounted just inside the 2-L door

on brackets made by Delta Mechanic Charles Spruill. A plaque will mark the spot, commemorating ship 812's Olympic mission.

## From cradle to pioneer

Hellenic Olympic Committee President Antonius Tzikas gave the flame, lit amid the ancient ruins of Olympia, to ACOG President Billy Payne April 26. The Friday evening ceremonies were conducted in the Athens Panathenaic Stadium where modern Olympic Games began 100 years ago.

In Saturday's pre-dawn hours, Payne and members of the original Atlanta bid team formed a procession with Allen across the Athens' airport tarmac. They walked amid young men and women in traditional garb, and news media cameras, including PBS and BBC crews working on Olympic-related documentaries.

"Carrying the flame was a unique opportunity for Delta, as official airline of ACOG and the HOC, serving Atlanta and Athens," said Terrence Burns, managing director—Olympic programs. "We linked not only the two cities, but also the two centuries, 1896 to 1996. Delta is the only airline that could do that."

## Los Angeles: the relay begins

More than 100 people rose to their feet in unison, cheering and clapping, as "The Centennial Spirit" touched down at Los Angeles International Airport.

Weeks of planning and hundreds of hours of hard work came to



Greek Olympic athletes help transfer the Olympic flame for its U.S. journey from a cauldron at the center of Athens' Panathenaic Stadium.

fruition at 7:55 a.m. Saturday, April 27, with the specially painted MD-11 positioned behind a 10-foot-high dais. The cheers swelled and drowned out a nearby jet as the lantern, in the hands of ACOG President Billy Payne, descended the stairs.

After short ceremonies that included Chairman Ron Allen and Dr. LeRoy Walker, president of the United States Olympic Committee, the flame and Olympic dignitaries flew aboard helicopters

to the Los Angeles Coliseum, site of the 1984 track and field Olympic events, to begin the 1996 Olympic Torch Relay.

## Olympic flame flight crew worthy of name

Four Delta pilots and 11 flight attendants beamed as brightly as the Olympic

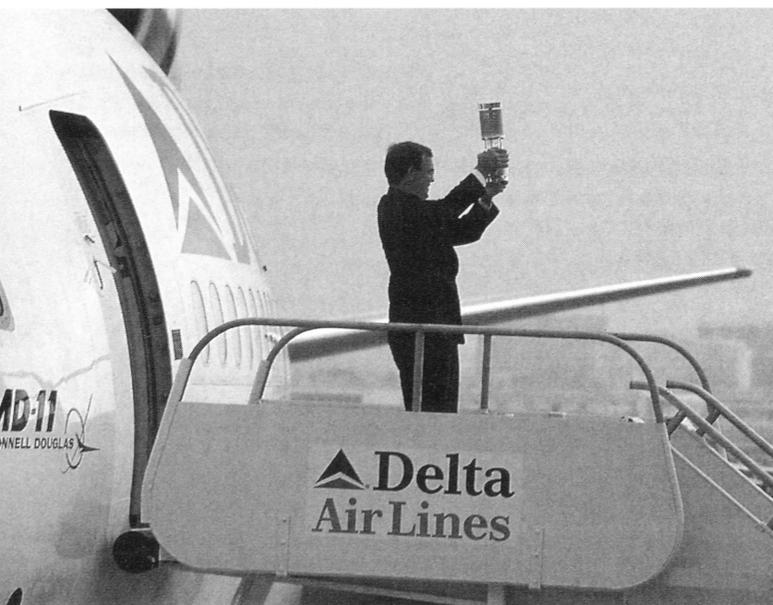
flame when Allen recognized their work on Flight 9696.

Los Angeles-based Flight Attendant Vivian Geter said, "There were cameras flashing everywhere, and not much sleep for anyone, at least during the first few hours of the flight. Everyone wanted a picture with the flame, making door 2-L the place to be onboard."

Geter said the 11 flight attendants worked very well together. "I think we were all infected with the Olympic spirit—it was hard not to be."

New York-based Chrys Siatras, a Greek native, was one of two Greek-speaking flight attendants onboard. She helped carry the flame from her old country to her new

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Billy Payne, ACOG president, hoists the Olympic flame soon after arrival in Los Angeles.



**The flight of the Olympic flame generated worldwide media attention for Delta and Chairman Ron Allen, including the BBC, NBC, and PBS.**

country (she's now a U.S. citizen).

"It was a special time to share with HOC members, who were somewhat sad that Athens was not the chosen venue, but were very proud to be sharing something with the world," said Siatras.

Flight 9696 departed Hellenikon International Airport at 3:45 a.m., and arrived at Los Angeles International at 7:50

a.m., with good weather en route.

"Since we were operating under charter regulations, we could keep the cockpit door open, a real treat for our passengers," said Capt. Dave Boaz. "It was a very ebullient crowd. They quieted down for a short nap, but as dawn broke over the North Atlantic, the spirit rekindled."

"It was a very proud moment for Delta and for the whole Olympic spirit," he said. Boaz also said Delta has filed with Societe Aeronautique, to mark Flight 9696 as the first commercial flight on the Athens-Los Angeles route.



**A hand-picked crew of four pilots and 11 flight attendants, including (left to right) Katy Hu, Vivian Geter, and Chrys Siatris, served the passengers onboard flight 9696 and ensured safe passage for the Olympic flame, attached to the MD-11 wall.**