



Ray Conner

2023 Pathfinder Award Recipient in The Manufacturing & Operations Categories

The Museum of Flight's Annual Pathfinder Awards honor individuals with ties to the Pacific Northwest who have made significant contributions to the development of the aerospace industry. Pathfinder Award recipients are selected by The Museum of Flight, the Pacific Northwest Section of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and representatives of other aviation and aerospace organizations and companies throughout the Northwest.



Ray Conner, former vice chairman of The Boeing Company and president and CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes (BCA), is described by his colleagues as a pioneering, humble leader who deeply appreciates the importance of meaningful, long-term relationships in the aerospace industry.

His Boeing career began as a mechanic on the 727 and ultimately spanned 40 years. He led Boeing's propulsion division, served as the vice president and general manager of the 747 and 777 programs, held multiple positions in sales, and led BCA's supply chain and management operations. During his tenure in leadership positions, Conner solidified and expanded Boeing's prominence in aerospace, deepened its ties to the Pacific Northwest, and managed relationships with Boeing's employees, customers, regulators and others across the industry.

During the years Conner led BCA, the company executed increases in production rates across airplane models, breaking annual delivery records multiple times and outdelivering its main competitor, Airbus, every year. Further, it laid the groundwork for achieving Boeing's current record of 806 annual deliveries the year following his retirement in 2018. In total, under his leadership, BCA delivered over 5,000 airplanes and sold over 7,000. These airplanes went to customers around the world, incorporating substantial efficiency gains that lessened their environmental impact. He also helped ensure

that the Northwest would remain the world's premier region for aviation innovation and manufacturing.

Conner managed a workforce numbering in the tens of thousands, many of whom called the Puget Sound region home. He represented his company's interests in negotiations between Boeing and its employees' unions, and ultimately secured Everett as the site of manufacture of Boeing's next generation 777X and its composite wing.

No description of Conner's tenure would be complete without comment on the greatest challenge he faced—the grounding of the 787 fleet due to battery issues, which occurred just six months after he moved into position. Many have spoken at length about the leadership he provided during those critical months: the countless hard judgment calls he made; the operating rhythm he established to manage the situation's many challenges; and the ways in which he personally put himself on the line to reassure Boeing's customers, partners and the flying public. Many senior aerospace leaders have praised his steadfast guidance as indispensable during the grounding, and indeed as the primary reason that Boeing emerged stronger and with its key customer, supplier and regulator relationships intact. Boeing did not lose a single 787 customer from the grounding.

Other corporate and government leaders describe Ray Conner as someone who deeply appreciates the importance of profound, longstanding relationships in the aerospace industry. As summarized by Brad Tilden, former chairman and chief executive officer of Alaska Air Group, "Over his long and successful career, he has earned a reputation for doing the right thing, both for customers and for employees. Many leaders aspire to this worthy goal, but Ray has actually done it."