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The Legacy of ValuJet. As we approached the 10th Memorial for ValuJet flight 592, I talked with family members and people impacted by ValuJet, a very preventable aviation disaster. As we remembered the 110 beautiful people who died that day, I was also thinking about **the legacy of ValuJet** ten years later.

Over ten years ago the ValuJet family members and people of the greater Miami-community came together; and together their volunteer and professional contributions made a difference, yet no one was looking for personal recognition. We could mention many names, but then we risk missing names of people who helped and served because there were so many.

The **ValuJet Memorial on the Tamiami Trail** is one of the finest air crash memorials I have seen. It is beautiful in its simplicity in the natural setting, and will be a place to remember loved ones for decades to come. Professional talent and pure hard work went into planning and constructing the monument, plus taking care of it today. The focus of the memorial was always to remember the 110 souls on board flight 592 on May 11, 1996.

ValuJet and the causes of the crash became **national news** quickly because of journalists and some government officials who chose to tell the truth rather than cover up the negligence. Whistleblowers had the courage to leak information so that the truth would be told, which documented the negligence of ValuJet and the FAA. The ValuJet fleet was grounded and aircraft retired. The Secretary of Transportation, FAA Administrator and more resigned under the pressure of their failures. The ValuJet website was established, one of the first air crash websites to help family members connect via the Internet. Family members became active, and the aviation industry and government had to publicly face accountability. The national media told the story.

Aviation Safety. When a person boards a commercial flight in the U.S. today the reason there are smoke detectors and fire suppression in the cargo hold, is because of ValuJet and NADA/F members working together to push the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to mandate these safety measures. Within six months of the crash the FAA said they would require fire detection in the cargo hold, but the usual unacceptable FAA delays followed. Because of pressure from family members, almost five years later, on March 19, 2001, the FAA mandate for smoke detectors and fire suppression in the cargo hold was completed. The FAA granted no extensions or delays, and 3,154 of the planes in the U.S. were converted, 264 airplanes were grounded until the maintenance was completed, and 65 aging jets that were not converted were retired.

ValuJet was the first U.S. aviation disaster that we know of that resulted in criminal prosecution.

The **federal criminal prosecution** against SabreTech (who handled the oxygen canisters and loading of the flight) resulted in a trial November 1999 with a guilty verdict against SabreTech on 9 counts. The sentencing imposed an \$11 million penalty for fines and restitution. SabreTech was out of business. Through the appeal process some convictions were overturned and fines greatly reduced. SabreTech appealed, but the federal prosecutors did not back down. **After the final appeal, SabreTech convicted of a felony, was forced to pay the reduced fine December, 2003.**

The **state criminal prosecution** led to an adjudicated verdict and financial penalties against SabreTech. This decision was also a landmark in promoting aviation safety, because it provided penalties and served notice to the aviation industry that there would be penalties for such negligence. Another first was the Court Order, per the request of ValuJet family members, that specified some of the financial penalties to NADA/F to promote aviation safety, security and support for victims' families.

After establishing the memorial monument, ValuJet family members decided to de-activate and work through NADA/F. NADA/F incorporated in 1995 and represents family members from over 100 aviation disasters, aviation professionals, and the traveling public. ValuJet family members continue to serve as NADA/F Board Members.

The **ValuJet Flight 592 Remembered Trust Fund** was established through NADA/F. The interest income provides flowers each year at the ValuJet Memorial site, oversight of the monument, and interest income to continue the important work to promote aviation safety and security for the long term.

The legacy of ValuJet over ten years later, continues to be people working together— to promote aviation safety, security and support for victims' families, to care for and maintain the memorial, and to honor and remember loved ones. Family members also help and serve in their own communities in many ways. I am honored to say thank you to the people who contributed in so many ways during the past ten years to honor loved ones. Thank you all very much.

Gail Dunham

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*MISSION: To raise the standard of safety, security and survivability
for aviation passengers and to support victims' families.*