NEWS RELEASE

Snowball Express lands at DFW with special passengers

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On Dec. 11, 2016, more than 1,700 children and widows/widowers of military service members fallen after Sept. 11, 2001, will travel to North Texas for Snowball Express — an annual event where families spend five days in remembrance, fun and bonding with friends old and new.

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, American and its flight crews volunteer their resources and time to fly 12 charters that transport family members to Dallas. But these are no ordinary flights. After a magical sendoff, families board decorated airplanes where flight attendants serve cookies as they sing holiday tunes over the PA.

“It’s the beginning of the bonding process,” says Francis “Buck” Kern, Snowball Express’ executive director. “Imagine being a kid. You live on a base. All of a sudden, your dad or mom is gone and you have to move off the base. You go to school. The kids there don’t understand the military. They don’t understand military death. So your mom hears about it and signs up for Snowball Express, you show up at an airport near you. You go to the gate and there are all these kids there, and they’re all just like you.”

Families unable to make a charter flight fly on miles donated through American Airlines Miles for Kids in Need program. They are greeted at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport with a huge welcome. “From beginning to end, it is about fun — allowing the kids to be kids again. It’s important for the healing process,” says Kern.

These Gold Star families then spend five days enjoying events and activities designed to create new memories and lasting friendships. Families from across the country come together to support each other, share their grief and celebrate their accomplishments after suffering such a devastating loss.

This year's Snowball Express includes open and closing ceremonies featuring magicians and acrobats, a trip to Medieval Times and a performance by Gary Sinise and his Lt. Dan Band, an annual highlight of the weekend.

American has been a presenting sponsor of Snowball Express since 2007 and has donated more than $1 million, earning the only Medal of Honor Contributor title.

"American really does give us the ability to connect these kids," says Kern. "And because of that, there are hundreds and thousands of families who've had their lives changed over the years."