NEWS RELEASE

Pilots find a friend in a Shanghai sandwich shop, get invited to the wedding

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As American Airlines flight crews travel around the world, faces in faraway places can become familiar over time. So familiar, in fact, deeply personal bonds can form even with a language barrier. That was the case for a group of pilots and one very special sandwich shop owner in Shanghai.

Back row, from left: First O□cer Ken Nelson, Capt. John Fitzgerald and Capt. Dave Shober pose with the wedding party at the ceremony in Ma'anshan, China.

The pilots took a high-speed train with Xu Fanglong from Shanghai to the venue of his son's wedding.

For years, Chicago-based Capt. Dave Shober, Capt. John Fitzgerald and First Officer Ken Nelson have been visiting a small sandwich and dumpling shop near the crew hotel in Shanghai. They're practically regulars, along with Dallas/Fort Worth-based Capt. J.P. Brooks and Chicago-based First Officer Bo Marciniw. Over time, the pilots realized that while the food was good, the company was even better. And they formed a close bond with the shop's owner, Xu Fanglong.

"His entire family speaks very little English, yet somehow a tremendous friendship has developed from our frequent 30-minute visits to his shop," Dave says. And even as the location of a new crew hotel increased the distance to Xu's shop, "this core group of pilots has kept the friendship growing," he says.

It's grown so much that last summer Xu invited all five pilots to his son's wedding in Ma'anshan, a small town outside the city. Dave, John and Ken were able to attend last month. After traveling halfway around the world on American, then to Ma'anshan via high-speed train and car, the pilots were honored to take part in two days of festivities, which included many traditions, customs, a lot of food, fireworks and music. "Several of the dinner guests

spoke English and told us we were the first Americans to visit their neighborhood," Dave says.

On the morning of the wedding, the pilots accompanied the groom to the bride's home while he presented gifts to her family — a symbolic gesture to gain permission to enter. The celebration concluded with a "roll call" of family and friends, each presenting a gift to the new couple. "It was our honor to experience such genuine welcoming, friendliness and respectfulness," Dave says.