

Stefanie Lathos-Polanco dedicates her life and career to servant leadership

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At American Airlines, it's not uncommon to hear stories of great bravery, quick thinking or clever resourcefulness occurring behind the scenes on tarmacs, in airports or somewhere along the aisle in an aircraft.

Each quarter, American recognizes hard-working team members who are often the ultimate team player with a positive attitude with the aptly named Above & Beyond awards. A&Bs, as they are called, are awarded to peers for great work and servant leadership.

Peers like Stefanie Lathos-Polanco. After becoming a Phoenix-based flight attendant in 2011, Stefanie wasted no time before getting involved. To name just a few of her pet projects: American Airlines' Critical Incident Response Team, the Flight Attendant Recruitment team, Airline Ambassadors International and Do Crew. Stefanie is also active Phoenix Flight Service team she organizes every year for the Susan G. Komen Walk — even decking out the crew room in pink to raise awareness for American's annual Be Pink campaign. And then there's the pet projects that involve pets themselves, including the Arizona Animal Welfare League & SPCA.

"I try to continue [my father's] legacy and be as involved as I possibly can in all the amazing outreach and humanitarian projects American Airlines has to offer."

But the organization that really stands out on her laundry list of good deeds is UNICEF's Change for Good program, in which travelers on selected international American Airlines flights can donate unused currency onboard the aircraft. Last year, the "Champions" gathering the donations — aka, flight attendants — collected \$1,048,668. The money was used to curb child malnutrition in Guatemala, support UNICEF's response for children during the earthquake in Ecuador as well as Hurricane Matthew in Haiti, contribute to UNICEF's flagship girls education initiative, "Let Us Learn," and support maternal and child health initiatives in Nicaragua and help children who need

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This year, Stefanie were nominated by her peers to be one of the four Champions of the Year, recognizing her for her passion, leadership and dedication to children around the world.

Chairman and CEO Doug Parker recognized the 2016 UNICEF Champions of the Year at the quarterly State of the Airline.

When asked what draws her to the Change for Good Program and all of the other teams focused on helping people, the answer comes easily. "I automatically think of my father," says Stefanie, of her dad who passed away in 2006. "He dedicated his entire career and life to assist others, opening countless nonprofit organizations in California and the Northwest. He instilled a strong need to give back to our community from the time I was little."

As a matter of fact, she took her first international humanitarian trip with UNICEF on the weekend of her Dad's birthday. "I couldn't think of a better way to honor him than to be starting officially with the program on his special day. I have a feeling he'll be looking down and feeling very proud. I have American Airlines to thank for that."

Knowing all of this about Stefanie, it was no surprise that she was nominated for an A&B in 2016. Each quarter at the State of the Airline address, American Airlines CEO and a "specially chosen assistant" conduct a raffle-style drawing, pulling the names of countless A&B nominees out of a large rotating drum. The prize? Ten thousand dollars.

In the second quarter of 2016, Stefanie's name was drawn. But it's what she did with the money that was the

biggest surprise of all: She gave it all away.

"I chose to pay it forward, so I gave my gift of American Airlines' \$10,000 to my favorite charities," Stefanie says. "I knew that the money really never felt like mine. I knew that it really belonged to people that were in need."

But her story doesn't end there. Really, that was just the beginning.

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In honor of Stefanie's generosity, at the next quarter's State of the Union meeting, CEO Doug Parker decided to pull three additional names from the drum full of A&B nominees — each to be given the \$10,000 grand prize. As Stefanie, the "specially chosen assistant," reached inside the drum and pulled the names, Doug said, "These are the 'Stefanie winners.' They only won because you were so generous with your winnings."

In typical Stefanie fashion, she gave him a hug. Truth be told, there are a lot of "Stefanie winners," people throughout the world who have benefitted from her generosity. Later, Stefanie had a chance to reflect on the whole experience. "I'm thankful to just be a small part of that story," Stefanie says. "If anything at all, really I'm just grateful."

This fall, she'll head out on her second humanitarian mission with Airline Ambassadors International, this time to Nepal where she'll spend time with the kids at The Divine Light School and teach English to monks at the Namobuddha Monastery. As part of that organization, she was asked to be a United Nations Representative for AAI, advocating for children's rights.

"Some of my favorite childhood memories are volunteering in our neighborhood, and in those less fortunate as well," says Stefanie of her own childhood, including those precious memories with her father. "This is why I try to continue his legacy and be as involved as I possibly can in all the amazing outreach and humanitarian projects American Airlines has to offer."