NEWS RELEASE

Chairman's Award winner pays it forward for future generations

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Every spring, American Airlines honors 100 or so team members with a Chairman's Award, the highest honor bestowed on individuals who have gone above and beyond to restore American as the greatest airline in the world. Along with the honor, recipients receive a plaque, a pin and a check for $10,000. These recipients tend to be such giving people that some of them ... well ... give it all away.

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Case in point: Kym Jackson, a Charlotte-based customer service agent. At the awards gala, Kym casually mentioned that she would be donating her winnings to Pleasant Ridge Elementary, a Title I school that receives financial assistance due to a high percentage of children from low-income families.

Two months earlier, as Kym was picking up her grandkids from school, she overheard staffers lamenting the fact that the school would not be able to afford a graduation event for fifth grade students going on to middle school. Kym immediately stepped up and shared with the staff that she would like to donate a portion of her award money to ensure the students would have a memorable graduation.

And they did — for the first time in three years. The graduating class came busting out of that commencement to find a surprise graduation party waiting for them: bounce houses, snow cones, a dunk tank, a barbecue lunch, free commemorative T-shirts and a deejay spinning the latest tunes. Much deserved for students who, as their principal says, "Come to school from non-ideal environments and challenges that they have no control of, but yet they are still resilient to push through with smiles on their faces."

Serendipitously, Kym's casual mention of her plan at the Chairman's Awards made its way back to American, and the airline decided to sponsor the whole experience so Kym could focus on her own needs. Turns out the reason Kym was picking up her grandchildren from school that fateful day is because she is their guardian. Kym's daughter died of a brain aneurysm four years ago. This summer, both of her grandchildren will undergo surgeries of their own: Her granddaughter has a recurring brain tumor and her grandson suffers from skull malformation.

Still, she wanted the award money to go to the school. "I believe when God blesses me, it is important to bless others. I want the kids to know that they matter and their situations do not define them," says Kym. "My grandmother taught me it is always better to give. She had a big heart. She would give you the clothes off her back if you needed them."

That trait must run in the family. Kym won the Chairman's Award for rescuing a coworker escaping domestic violence. The mother and son were still in their pajamas when Kym took them in, so she clothed them, and they we're able to return to work and school. They were complete strangers to Kym before the incident.

In the end, Kym still believes she was just doing her job and the award money wasn't hers. She donated it to A New Way of Life, a nonprofit that helps rehabilitate women who have been incarcerated.

"I'm at a point in my life that I feel compelled to help others," says Kym. "If my bills need to be paid, I can pay them the way I have always paid them: by working hard every day. There are people who do not have some of the same opportunities that I have been afforded, and they could use a little extra push. That's what I think matters most."