NEWS RELEASE

Helping Team Rubicon in their disaster relief mission

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As Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW)-based Captain Jim Palmersheim looked around a Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) terminal on the morning of Sept. 9, he felt many emotions. There was the determination that he shared with the 100 Team Rubicon volunteers — a group of military veterans and first responders who rapidly deploy during emergencies — that he would be transporting to Houston in response to Hurricane Harvey; it was a determination to get there and start helping people.

There was awe of these individuals. “We were hearing the reports of the incredible devastation, and it was just humbling to see a sense of urgency among the volunteers,” he said. “Not knowing where they’d be staying that night — a church basement, gym — no one was worried about their personal comfort. It was, ‘How quickly can we get there? How quickly can we deploy? How quickly can we help?’”

And he felt pride — proud to work for an airline that, when Norton Schwartz, retired general and former Chief of Staff for the United States Air Force, reached out for assistance to transport Team Rubicon volunteers, within hours had committed to help and had a plan in place.

Over the next five weeks, American Airlines would donate a total of 11 round-trip charter flights from Los Angeles, Seattle and Boston to Houston’s George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH), and seven cities in between, to help the disaster response organization deploy nearly 700 volunteers in support of Hurricane Harvey relief efforts.

Harvey dumped dozens of inches of rain, causing significant issues for Houston, the surrounding areas and their residents.

“It was an honor to be the captain for this first flight, and I am proud that American and our team members stepped

up to make it happen," said Palmersheim, who is also American's senior manager of Military and Veterans Initiatives. "Being able to help those in need through our support of Team Rubicon is truly humbling."

Since Hurricane Harvey made landfall, Team Rubicon has deployed 1,600 volunteers to Texas in support of the ongoing hurricane relief effort. An additional 148 volunteers provided remote support from their National Operations Center in Dallas.

While Team Rubicon provides critical services to people at a time of deep distress, Palmersheim said that the work is beneficial for the volunteers, as well. "While they're there providing disaster relief, it's a time of healing for the veterans and first responders, to take the skills they've learned in the profession and give back and help in communities in need," he said.

Every step of the way, American team members have held gateside send-offs, shared well wishes and cheered words of appreciation as they witnessed Team Rubicon volunteer after volunteer make their way to the devastation.

"One of the best parts about working for American, I'm learning, is that we respond," said Tony Hernandez, a New York-based flight attendant. "Most companies in the world don't have the opportunity to literally take hundreds of volunteers to an area of the country that is really hurting right now. And that's what we are doing, and I'm a part of that today. It really makes me proud to be a part of this charter flight."

During the past six weeks, Team Rubicon volunteers have come from Boston, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Kansas City, New York City, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. These men and women have spent countless hours serving more than 700 families throughout the greater Houston area.

"I've always had a feeling inside of me that I had to serve," commented Joseph Cognoscenti, a student volunteer from Millstone, New Jersey. "I'm going to school for a related field. When all these hurricanes were happening, I said to myself, 'this is the time' to go out and test my education and my mindset. I came across Team Rubicon online and knew this was the one [organization] that I wanted to be a part of."

This weekend, the final charter will bring home the remaining volunteers — back to their hometowns, loved ones and day jobs.

New York City-based flight attendants Niko Gutierrez, Kathy Iannettoni and Tony Hernandez prepare for members of Team Rubicon to board at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

Dallas/Fort Worth-based Captain Jim Palmersheim, senior manager, Military and Veterans Initiatives and Dallas/Fort Worth-based First Officer Julio Gomez flew the first charter flight from Los Angeles, landing at George Bush Intercontinental Airport.

More than 700 members of Team Rubicon were transported by American to Houston to help muck out and salvage hundreds of homes throughout southeastern Texas.

Members of Team Rubicon from Southern California rally together for a final debrief before heading to Houston.