NEWS RELEASE

Straight to the Gate: Debby Simpson

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“Keep looking forward and keep moving forward” is the motto Chicago O’Hare (ORD)-based flight attendant Debby Simpson lives by. The three-time cancer survivor believes keeping a positive outlook has helped in her fight against the disease.

“I look to other people living with cancer and cancer survivors for inspiration,” Debby said. “They give me the motivation to live the best life I can, enjoy every moment and to be positive and strong.”

“In December 2000, I was initially diagnosed with breast cancer,” Debby said. “I found a small lump. All the tests up until what they call a simple lumpectomy were negative for cancer. I wasn’t even expecting to be diagnosed. But when the tumor came out, it tested positive for cancer.”

Debby underwent chemotherapy and radiation and returned to work about 15 months later, but she wasn’t in the clear.

“In December 2003, I was diagnosed again. I was on an airplane to London, having some back issues, and I knew

something was wrong," she said. "I went to my chiropractor and he suggested I go to my oncologist, and I thought 'what?' So I went to my oncologist, he took a PET scan and my cancer had come back."

This time, the cancer returned in Debby's bones, brain, liver and lung. "It was a pretty daunting diagnosis at that time," she said. Once again, the American Airlines flight attendant underwent cancer treatment. It took Debby about six years before she was back to flying full-time.

"I finally did come back to work and back to flying. I'm very happy flying," she said. "I love being a flight attendant. I love the job," Debby said. "Of course, my seniority over the years has gotten better, so I've been able to rearrange my schedule so I can travel, be with family, be with friends; and I love taking care of our customers on the airplane. I'm excited about all the new aircraft we have and the new destinations coming up."

While on a layover in Paris in 2014, Debby suffered another health setback. "I had a cardiac arrest," she said. "I went out to get coffee and never came back to the hotel."

A passing stranger found Debby in the street and called out for someone to perform CPR. Debby was rushed to the hospital and spent two weeks in Paris before coming home with a defibrillator.

"When I came home, I wasn't getting better as fast as I thought I should," Debby said. "I have always been very energetic; I have always worked out; I have always had a healthy lifestyle; I always eat as healthy as I could and I was just not bouncing back." That's when Debby went back to her oncologist for the third diagnosis.

"I still continue to do maintenance treatments that help keep my cancer stable," she said.

Debby's positive outlook is something she strives to share with others. She hopes to get back in the air once again, but in the meantime, she spends her spare time mentoring those who are going through the same thing.

"Since I have been going through cancer for so long, it has provided me the opportunity to try and inspire and support other people," she said. "I mentor other cancer patients and people who are dealing with cancer and it makes me feel good that I can help somebody be a little more positive because I have done so well."

She is also thankful for all of the help and support she has received over the years.

"It's overwhelming but that is where your friends and family and the flight attendant core come in to play. They have helped; they have been there for me and they have supported me," she said. "Whether it was somebody I knew or somebody I didn't know, I got a card or phone call, or something on Facebook, somebody telling me they

were just thinking of me, even if I didn't know them. Just hearing that makes me feel really good and it gives me the energy and strength and the power to stay positive."

And living her motto, Debby keeps moving forward.

"Once you are diagnosed with cancer, you have cancer but it doesn't mean you have to die from cancer. You can keep living. You can keep enjoying your life. You can keep enjoying your family and that enjoyment can be shown in many different ways. So, get out there and enjoy your life."