

NEWS RELEASE

Flight attendant reflects on 10 years of Snowball Express

12/12/2017

ORD-based Flight Attendant Katrina Fraley remembers responding immediately the first time she saw a call for help to coordinate an event called "Snowball Express." A joint email from American Airlines and the Association of Professional Flight Attendants said that volunteers were needed to help create a special experience for families of America's fallen military service members — families that have made the ultimate sacrifice. It touched her on a personal level. Katrina is part of a military family — her dad, brother, all her uncles, grandfather and great-grandfather have served in the military. She immediately replied to volunteer.

That was 10 years ago.

Every year since then, Katrina has served as a charter coordinator for the event. She is one of nearly 1,000 team members who come together each year to help make Snowball Express happen. Katrina helps make sure her charter flight — one of nearly 100 that American flew this last weekend to transport more than 1,600 children and spouses to the Dallas-Fort Worth area — runs smoothly. The list of duties is long: coordinating travel, purchasing decorations for terminal arrivals, making sure the special guests are comfortable, attend all events with the families and help orchestrate nightly activities with the kids at the hotel.

"We dress up for theme nights. The kids get a kick out of it. They call us the 'adult kids,'" she said. "We are there throughout the five-day event doing anything from helping hold a hand, give a hug or tissue, listening to the stories of the kids and parents about their loss of their hero parent or just making the kids laugh."

She said the experience of volunteering with Snowball Express has been life-changing. "These kids have become part of my family," Katrina said. "You see the sacrifices these kids have given and how strong they are. They

understand the true meaning of patriotism and the ultimate sacrifice. They are heroes."

She says she sees the bond the program helps build. Kids form lasting relationships with other kids who have had the same experiences, and they bond with the volunteers who continue to answer the call to volunteer, like Katrina. "I have seen so many grow up and a few have kids of their own," she said. "There is a bond with the kids and the surviving parent that forms once they tell you their story that can't be broken. It's become a lesson that freedom isn't free, and I need to be there for them. At Snowball Express, we are all family."

2006: Taken the first year American was involved with Snowball Express, Katrina poses with the flight attendants of the first charter on an MD-80 from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to LAX.

2012: Three sisters and a new "Snowball BFF," who they met on the charter, pose with Katrina and Patriot Guard members at Six Flags Over Texas.

2013: Snowball kids, fellow Flight Attendant Teri Ramirez and Katrina run to catch a bus.

2015: Katrina poses with Snowball Express participant Rebecca, who is also a pageant queen.

2015: During Rock Star theme night, Katrina and fellow flight attendant Teri Ramirez dressed up as Kiss with some of the kids.

2016: Active duty soldiers from Chicagoland bases come to wish the kids and their families a fun and safe journey during the send-off from ORD.

2016: Katrina has watched these four teens grow up. Here they pose at the Grand Prairie Armed Forces Reserve Complex.

2016: Flight attendants pose with Clark as they prepare to depart from ORD with a Moana-themed Snowball Express gate.

2016: Kids dance during the talent show.

2017: Katrina poses with Gregory in the Fort Worth Stockyards during this year's Snowball Express.