

CR Smith Museum: A reflection of American Airlines

8/31/2018

When Betty Overstreet walked into the CR Smith Museum on a recent afternoon, she didn't get far before she was greeted by familiar faces. Fellow volunteer Ron Coleman came up for a hug and a quick chat. There was more catching up with team members Judith Clark and Judy Bunch in the museum store.

A lanyard around her neck, displaying an American Airlines logo from the 1940s, held her company retiree badge, but she can recite her seniority without reference or hesitation: April 2, 1951. She worked at the City Ticket Offices in Dallas. Her husband, H.A. Jack Overstreet, was a pilot for 10 years before moving to Dispatch, where his flight deck knowledge was helpful.

Betty has been volunteering with the museum for 27 years. "I've been volunteering longer than I was an employee," she said. "I know how important this museum is to the people who work for the airline."

The museum celebrated its 25th anniversary this summer. For two years before it opened, Betty joined the grassroots efforts of American team members to gather donations, drive membership and catalogue artifacts. She remembers the ribbon-cutting ceremony on July 3, 1993.

"We had a grand opening. You walked through those revolving doors and everything was bright and shiny and beautiful. I can almost get emotional over it. We never thought we could have something like this. This place. It showed that all of us, all the different departments in the airline, were all working for the same team. We were proud of the airline, and we wanted to be the best."

— Betty Overstreet

The museum recently went through a redesign to put more focus on that team. The new exhibits share the history

of aviation through the experiences of American Airlines team members, working together. Team members directly contributed to the new permanent exhibits, which highlight how each of them is crucial to the success of the airline.

“There are so many facets of getting that airplane to the gate and then back into the air,” said Dominic Orlando, a Fleet Service Clerk who has been with the company for 41 years. “There are so many groups that make it happen and some of those are unseen by the public. This will illuminate that just a little bit — shine a light on all the workgroups that people are not aware of.”

Dominic stars in the Baggage Loader exhibit, an interactive gaming demonstration that allows visitors to pretend to be Fleet Service team members and load baggage into the “front” and “aft,” all while the clock ticks to ensure an on-time departure.

A guy that’s not used to attention, he said he stepped out of his comfort zone to film the project. But he said he was committed to doing his best. He had a new uniform he hadn’t worn. He packed all his official protective gear. He said he is proud of the airline and all it does for the communities that he and his fellow team members live in and serve, and was excited to be able to participate.

“I wanted to represent the company properly and do it right,” he said. “I have 41 years of loyalty in me, and to be able to do something like this — I feel left my mark and hopefully some kids get some fun out of it and learn something from it. If one little girl looks at her mom or dad and did well doing that game and smiles, then I think it’s worth it.”

Betty is just now getting a chance to become familiar with the new exhibits. She wants to be able to knowledgably guide guests when they start visiting. When she sees the Airport Command Center, a new interactive exhibit where visitors make decisions such as deviating, delaying or cancelling flights to get customers safely to their destinations, she’s in awe. “I wish my husband and his coworkers could see,” she said. “They would be speechless. The way the airline is set up now. And this exhibit. I’m not adept at electronics, but I’m very interested in seeing how this one works.”

In appreciation of team members’ contributions, the CR Smith Museum opened its doors to them as the first visitors to the redesigned space. The museum opens to the public this weekend with extended hours. Visit crsmithmuseum.org for more information.

Retiree Betty Overstreet, who worked in the City Ticket Offices in Dallas beginning in 1951, has been a volunteer at the CR Smith Museum for 27 years.

The museum’s redesigned exhibits highlight how the industry has changed, including the technology that team members use to do their job.

The museum highlights all the teams that work to make American a successful airline.

The American Airlines Global exhibit displays all American Airlines flights in their real locations and in real time.