American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Standing up to cancer, together

9/7/2018

“This little thing here,” Michael Brescia says with a grin as he holds his cane up. “This is an improvement.”

Considering Michael was paralyzed by a tumor on his spine a few short months ago, the cane is a welcomed friend and a reminder of how far he has come.

This summer, Michael used that cane to walk into an American Airlines hangar at Los Angeles International Airport with his partner, Arlene Garcia. The two Miami Reservations agents joined nearly 100 fellow American team members — all who are survivors or co-survivors of cancer — to film a special music video for Stand Up To Cancer, a charitable initiative of the Entertainment Industry Foundation that aims to raise funds for translational cancer research through online and televised efforts.

The spot runs tonight, Sept. 7, during the biennial telecast that airs from 7 to 8 p.m. CT on all the major networks.

For many it was an emotional day filled with inspiration from sharing their stories and the uplifting message of helping the fight to find a cure. A common sentiment about how shocking it is to hear that you’ve been diagnosed with cancer.

“When people hear cancer, it’s like time stops,” Arlene said. “We’ve talked to everybody here who’s had that same shock. It makes you adjust everything in your life to address it.”

Michael agreed. “It’s a word that has just a tremendous impact on you. It changes your perspective on everything. For the good as well as the bad,” he added.

One in three women and one in two men in the United States will hear the words, “You have cancer” in their

lifetime.

“The Stand Up To Cancer telecast is such a creative and unique way to bring attention to and raise funds for a disease that impacts so many,” said Chris Singley, Managing Director of Community Relations and Employee Engagement at American Airlines. “Being there in the LAX hangar with our team members who are fighting this fight was so inspiring. We consider it our duty to continue to bring members of the American team together to participate in Stand Up events, celebrate how far they’ve come in their cancer journey and continue to raise funds for critical research that turns all cancer patients into survivors.”

Working at American is the second career for Michael and Arlene. Both were retired from their previous careers, but were drawn to the airline after both family and friends recommended they apply.

“We both have traveled our whole lives, and we know the world from a different point of view,” Arlene said. “We just thought it would be a great opportunity for us so we did it, together. We got hired at the same time.”

The American Airlines family has been a strong support system for the couple as they continue the journey of Michael’s recovery. He’s grateful for the flexibility and the encouragement that he receives from his work community and opportunities like filming a PSA that brings him closer to others who share his experience.

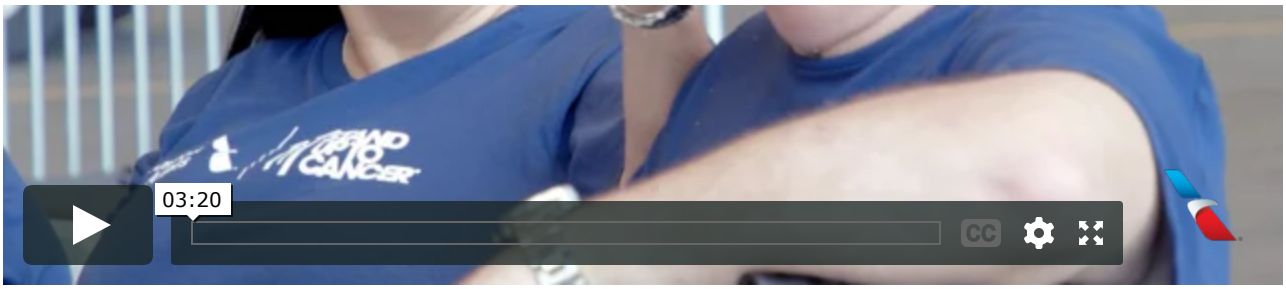
“Cancer has changed my life,” Michael said. “Sometimes you’ll get a customer who’ll say hey, I’m dealing with this. I tell them, ‘You’re going to do it. You’re just going to do it. Just keep going.’ Everybody here has got that same attitude. Just keep going forward.”

Michael Brescia and Arlene Garcia, seated bottom left, joined nearly 100 fellow team members to film the video this summer.

Dana Wilson, a choreographer who has worked with Justin Timberlake, directs team members during the shoot.

Philadelphia Customer Service Agent Ronald Barr is cheered on by fellow team members during the video shoot





Meet Michael and Arlene and hear more of their inspirational story in this behind-the-scenes look at the creation of the SU2C spot.