American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Love is in the air

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A passion for travel and adventure brought these Chicago aviation couples together.

Having a forever copilot

Chicago O'Hare (ORD)-based First Officer Erica Schmitt and First Officer Larry Schmitt recently celebrated their 10-year wedding anniversary. Both pilots were hired at American Airlines in 1999, but they didn't meet until running into each other at work on Valentine's Day in 2007. An official date followed a few days later. Now, the couple share their passion for aviation and travel with their 9-year-old daughter, Sarah, who loves to design and create paper airplanes.

The Schmitt family will tell you they're like any family. They enjoy doing hobbies together — hiking, biking and skiing. They take annual trips. Last year, the family visited Kauai, Hawaii and the Amalfi Coast in Italy. But the complexities of their family life are both simplified and compounded by the pilot life and the schedules that come with it.

The Schmitts are one of a handful of pilot couples based at ORD. These couples have different perspectives on balancing those crazy schedules, juggling responsibilities and finding time for hobbies. But, they've all found ways to navigate around that turbulence — both in the air and on the ground. Understanding the nuanced life of a pilot helps the couples find work-life balance.

Erica and Larry Schmitt met at American on Valentine's Day more than 10 years ago.

Synching schedules

First Officer Theresa Mally once came home from a trip to find her husband, First Officer Dave Morphew, standing in the driveway in his uniform with their first-born baby. “He had unexpectedly been called out. We made the handoff in the driveway and off he went to work,” Theresa remembered.

Both children of pilots, Dave and Theresa loved aviation at an early age. They met in 1984 at a commuter airline, and Theresa broke her personal rule to avoid dating a fellow pilot. She reasoned that since they were so close in seniority, they’d likely never fly together. As fate would have it, they married in 1988, and the couple has flown together several times, the last few years on the Boeing 777 and 787.

One of their favorite trips together was a flight to Rome where they enjoyed sightseeing, food and people-watching — all crammed into a 24-hour layover. Since their two kids have grown, Theresa and Dave said they have far fewer scheduling issues these days.

Theresa Mally and Dave Morphew in Hawaii.

Making it a team effort

First Officer Julie Daudelin and First Officer Tim Daudelin have three children: Ashley (27), Sydney (15) and Matthew (11). They’ve developed a flying-friendly system, using FaceTime for homework and scheduling trips so that at least one parent can attend the kids’ extracurricular activities and sporting events.

“Our biggest challenge is raising our children, but I think that’s everyone’s biggest challenge,” Julie said. “We just have to be a bit more creative with it.” For example, this year, they planned a big family party for Sydney’s birthday. But, after finishing a trip, Julie was selected for a random drug test as part of regular protocol and missed her flight home. While Julie caught a later flight, Tim baked the cake and cooked dinner for the crowd. The Daudelins are big on teamwork.

Julie and Tim met when they were scheduled on airport reserve, and they’ve flown together several times, including on American’s 787 fleet. They take advantage of any time they can spend together with their unusual work schedules. Last summer while on different trips, they both had a layover in London where they were able to attend qualifying rounds at Wimbledon. They said American is their extended family, and now they encourage their teenage daughter Sydney who has expressed interest in becoming a pilot.

Julie and Tim Daudelin in the cockpit.

Inspiring the next generation

Married in August of 1996, Captain Steve Jones and Captain Gail Jones also have a budding pilot in their family. Their 19-year-old son John is working on his Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) license and pilot ratings at Southern Illinois University. Steve, Gail and John are airplane enthusiasts. They own and fly several airplanes ranging from antiques to warbirds, sail planes, aerobatic airplanes and a couple of family travel aircraft. Steve and John also like to build and restore homebuilt and vintage airplanes. They always have at least two projects in the shop at any time.

Aviation inspires much of what the Jones family does. Steve and Gail volunteer their time with a variety of organizations and aviation events to promote interaction for pilot families and friends in a nonwork environment. Steve volunteers for the Allied Pilots Association (APA) Professional Standards Committee, which helps pilots confidentially clear up peer conflicts. Gail, a recent Chairman's Award winner (American's highest honor), is co-chair of Project Wingman, a peer-assistance group that helps pilots with a variety of personal and health issues.

The Jones family loves to travel, and the couple said they've had dates all over Europe and South America. Their favorite destinations include Paris, Helsinki and the Christmas Market in Frankfurt when John was a little boy. They said the most challenging part of being a pilot couple has been creating a home while balancing work and their hectic schedules. But the best part, they said, is having an excellent understanding of each other's work experiences and problems. They often compare notes, share stories and gain each other's perspective on various components of the job.

Gail and Steve Jones at recurrent training together.

Understanding each other's needs

Captain Colleen Anderson and Captain Bill Anderson would agree. They said that one of the best parts of being married to another pilot is that your spouse understands your job and all of the nuances that come with it. For instance, there's no drama if you're reassigned, stuck overnight or delayed with weather. "You can tell a story pretty quickly and the person just gets it," Colleen said. "It's like, OK, great … what do you want to do for dinner?"

Celebrating 30 years of marriage, Bill and Colleen said they are fortunate to be 787 captains. Bill loved airplanes since he was a boy and dreamed of becoming a pilot. Colleen started taking flying lessons in high school and was inspired by her female instructor. The couple met at another airline but didn't start dating until they reconnected at American in the '80s. They flew together as copilots once in 1991 right before Bill

upgraded to captain because they knew it might be their only chance. After they first married, the couple had a week of completely opposite schedules. Bill's three days off were Colleen's three days working. Since then, they've been more proactive when bidding and are able to get the same days off. They see each other quite a bit and love to enjoy the outdoors together.

When they're not flying, they enjoy bicycling, motorcycles, hiking and cross-country skiing. Though they've been on many trips throughout their marriage, some of their favorite destinations are Rwanda and Peru. Colleen said that they both feel incredibly lucky to have been in this job and marriage for as many years as they have. "It's been better than we could have expected," Colleen said. "It's an incredible blessing and adventure that we're still in. … We know we have many more things to look forward to."

Colleen and Bill Anderson in Peru.