American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

American Airlines team members log record-breaking volunteer hours in 2018

4/29/2019

April is National Volunteer Month. At American Airlines, we encourage and celebrate volunteerism and community engagement year-round. With volunteering being a deep part of the culture at the airline, we take this opportunity to celebrate a few of the top volunteers based on hours and the organizations they are passionate to serve.

Training for future assistance
Sue Schmitz sits with her most recent trainee, Ritzy, during the service dog's graduation.

Sue Schmitz's day job is Commodity Manager at the hangar at Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix. But when she goes home, her passion is raising puppies for Canine Companions for Independence. She trains them for their future career – to become assistance dogs for people with disabilities.

Over the last decade, she has raised five puppies that graduated to breeders or full-service assistance dogs. As a puppy raiser, she teaches the dogs 32 commands and socializes them in public. Because her volunteer needs are unique, she's grateful to the company for allowing her to bring her future service dog to work. Of course, there are strict boundaries and responsibilities, but since Sue works in an office environment, it's been a success. She's easily logged more than 1,000 hours training her pups.

Feeling supported by American in many ways, Sue gets emotional when she describes the impact service dogs make when placed with their person. "The people are so grateful for their dogs because it changes their lives and allows them to be independent," she said. "It's amazing to be part of a company that supports me in doing this."

Helping kids cope

Bruce Sickler, seated, poses with children participating in It's Cool to Fly American event.

A trailblazer in disability issues, DFW-based Reservations Agent Bruce Sickler founded the It's Cool to Fly American (ICTFA) program to help kids with autism adjust to various stimuli in the airport. On average, Bruce logs more than 1,000 volunteer hours per year and says it's all about balance, time management and support from his American team and family.

Now on its fifth year, ICTFA's benefits are twofold: To help children with disabilities and educate team members on how to better serve customers with special needs. "Being disabled myself, it hits home," Bruce said. "We have a big opportunity as the world's largest airline to make a difference in the lives of people traveling with disabilities. It's a good feeling."

Supporting our military families

George Galloway has fun with kids before last year's mAAgic Flight at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago.

A familiar face at ORD, Fleet Service Clerk George Galloway is a fixture at airport volunteer events. Since he started with American four years ago, he's been logging service hours with American's Do Crew program, the airline's volunteer program, that awards service with airline miles for the volunteer's chosen nonprofit organization. Each year he said he has progressively beat his own Do Crew goals, targeting 2,000 volunteer hours this year.

George said he is grateful to be part of a company that values volunteerism and enjoys the opportunity to give back. Among his favorite causes, he's most impacted by pediatric patients and military veterans. He frequently travels out of town to volunteer, and he looks forward to spending time with and supporting military families that have lost a loved one at the annual Snowball Express. He also spends time supporting children with life-threatening illnesses at Give Kids the World Village.

Inspired by his faith to give back, George said he shares his contagious laugh with others so they can take a break from reality. "On these trips, I don't think of what they're going through," he said. "When they're with me, I want them to enjoy life and feel supported. I want the families to be at ease because they're usually at home stressing all of the time."

Snowball Express brings together nearly 1,000 American Airlines team member volunteers to support more 1,700 children of the fallen and their surviving parent or guardian as they visit for five days of fun and fellowship. This year's event was in Orlando, Florida. The special experience has a profound impact on families.

Passing on the passion to give

Shari Jenkins, bottom left, poses with the flight crew before taking off at Snowball Express.

DFW-based Flight Attendant Shari Jenkins volunteers for the Snowball Express, too, and said she's experienced powerful moments even after the charter flights lands back home. Children from past trips have recognized her in local Fort Worth grocery stores and restaurants.

It's not unusual for Shari to log more than 1,000 hours each year, but she said she doesn't find the time to volunteer – she makes the time. As a child, Shari's grandparents cultivated her giving spirit and now she passes that down to her grandchildren.

"Volunteering is the best gift you can give yourself and other people," she said. "American Airlines has afforded me the ability to have the privilege to volunteer the way I do. Until someone volunteers, I don't think they understand the depth of it."

In 2018, team members collectively logged 186,768 volunteer hours systemwide, breaking the previous record and helping millions of people along the way. The Do Crew program allows team members to add, search and sign up for volunteer opportunities that match their individual interests and passions. Although serving the cause they love is rewarding enough, they have incentive to log hours in the Do Crew portal to earn miles for a nonprofit organization. Flights for 50, a mileage rewards program, recognizes and awards volunteers for their commitment to service. After logging 50 hours of volunteer time, Do Crew volunteers receive a mileage reward of 25,000 AAdvantage miles to gift to a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) of their choice. Eligible volunteers can gift two rewards each year for their chosen organization to use for travel expenses or as a fundraising tool.

American issued nearly 6 million miles in 2018 through the Flight for 50 program, benefitting a range of organizations as diverse as our team members and the customers the airline serves. Through Flight for 50, American is able to support the passions of the team and contribute to causes that mean the most to them and the communities where they live and work.