

NEWS RELEASE

Flying with pride

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Fifty years ago today, in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, members of the New York City Police Department's Public Morals Squad raided the Stonewall Inn, a nondescript bar in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, popular with the LGBTQ community. And while raids were normal occurrences at that time, the spontaneous actions of those that gathered outside on Christopher Street in protest sparked lasting change as an invisible group found its voice.

"The days that followed were frightening and invigorating," said Chuck Walters, an American Airlines AAdvantage Customer Service Agent and participant in the Stonewall protests that developed following the raid. "We didn't really know what would happen, but the protests motivated us to be visible and to demand respect. For the first time, people felt empowered to come out, and, in turn, conversations began to shift from them to us."

What followed was a national movement advocating for equal rights and protections of LGBTQ people in the United States. Change came slowly, but progress was achieved over time through courageous acts and pioneering efforts of countless individuals.

In the early 1990s, American Airlines LGBTQ team members began establishing the company's first employee business resource group. At the same time, a handful of pilots — identifiable only by aviation themed T-shirts — gathered in Provincetown, Massachusetts, to form the National Gay Pilots Association (NGPA).

"What started as a way of building community has grown into an international organization that unites and advocates for inclusion on behalf of LGBTQ aviators," said Capt. David Pettet, an American team member and President of the NGPA. "I'm incredibly encouraged to work in an industry and for a company that understands the value of inclusion — supporting people like me in our careers while advocating for our rights in the communities

they do business.”

David sees his position and the time he spends in the cockpit as an opportunity to engage colleagues in honest conversations that break down barriers. And he’s seen perspectives change. “One of the biggest pieces of advice I can give my colleagues is to reconsider your assumptions and change how you ask questions. Doing so helps show understanding and fosters a safe space for others to be themselves.”

During his decade as a pilot, David said he has seen tremendous progress. But there’s still work to do. “The 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots gives us an opportunity to recognize the efforts of all those who’ve moved us closer toward equality while renewing our commitment to give a voice to those still marginalized within our community,” he said.

In commemoration of the brave acts that launched the gay rights movement, a special Pride flight landed at New York’s LaGuardia Airport earlier today, piloted by David with an all LGBTQ flight crew: First Officer Hank Cain, Flight Attendant Josh Bost and Flight Attendant Terry Alston.

The flight kicked off American’s involvement in Stonewall 50 and World Pride, a set of multiday international events in New York City that inspire, educate and celebrate the LGBTQ community, with company leaders, team members and customers.

Chuck was on board the flight, too. “Fifty years later, and I’m still invigorated by the energy and enthusiasm of the LGBTQ community and our relentless pursuit toward a more inclusive society for all,” he said. “I’m proud to be a part of today’s Pride Flight and humbled to work for a company that continues to advocate for legislation acknowledging the rights and freedoms of LGBTQ people across the globe.”

When asked what the chance to pilot American’s first-ever Pride flight meant to him, David said, “I’m humbled it’s given me the opportunity to meet and give back to those who’ve made my path possible. I hope the flight gives aspiring LGBTQ aviators the confidence to pursue their dreams and demonstrates to my fellow team members and our customers that they’re valued onboard American for who they are.”

From left, Flight Attendant Danny Cabrera, Flight Attendant Terry Alston, Flight Attendant Josh Bost, Capt. David Pettet, First Officer Hank Cain and Flight Attendant Kyle Costa were on board the Pride flight.

Danny and Kyle join American’s Pride flight crew.