American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

One world, one love

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Fleet Service Clerk Griselda Perez grew up around airplanes. Her dad was a ramp crew chief for TWA in St. Louis. Her mom worked at the airport. Airport life was all she knew.

TeeTee, as Griselda is affectionately known, said that from an early age her father encouraged her and her siblings to work in aviation. “The world is yours,” he would tell them, referring to the non-rev flight privileges they used to travel to new destinations. Griselda said that she and her sister aspired to become flight attendants, and her brother wanted to be a pilot. But in 1996, after graduating high school, TeeTee followed in her father’s footsteps and got her first job on the ramp with TWA in St. Louis.

Her dad also taught her it was important to be herself. TeeTee said she knew she was a lesbian in her early teens, but never felt comfortable telling her Catholic family. When she decided to share with them in 2001, they were supportive of her.

TeeTee found that her work family would be just as encouraging. One of only 25 women on the ramp at TWA, TeeTee said that coming out as a gay woman was especially terrifying to her. “I didn’t know what reaction I was going to get and didn’t want to be discriminated against,” she said.

Even though she was concerned, when she opened up to her colleagues, they were accepting and respectful. But she still felt uneasy — now it was time to navigate a whole new world.

In 2008, TeeTee transferred to work for American Airlines Cargo in Miami and later moved to the ramp. She said the culture in Miami helped her feel free and more open to share. “There were more gay women on the ramp, and I finally felt comfortable.”

With that new found comfort, TeeTee began taking leadership roles in her community.

She formed the Miami chapter of the PRIDE Employee Business Resource Group in 2017 and led the charge for American to be a sponsor of the Miami Beach Pride Parade, an event that draws close to 100,000 spectators.

“TeeTee recognized that there was a need for a PRIDE chapter in Miami and ran with the idea,” said Harvey Howell, Customer Assistant Representative and Vice President of PRIDE. “With passion and determination, she recruited team members who had been looking for unity in the LGBTQ space.”

Knowing that PRIDE has helped people feel comfortable being themselves at American means a lot to TeeTee. “They feel like they have a community here,” she said, adding that she is always being thanked for bringing PRIDE to Miami.

“TeeTee has been a pioneer in Miami in the LGBTQ arena,” said Elba “Michelle” Lara, a Customer Operations Crew Chief. “She’s opened Pandora’s box, and, after 32 years of working at American, I finally felt comfortable coming out to my work family.”

While she still deals with peers that don’t accept the LGBTQ community, TeeTee has learned to overcome that. “Some men don’t want to take orders from a woman. And throw in that you’re gay? It makes even harder.” But she said that having the airline respect, acknowledge and accept the PRIDE community speaks volumes. “What’s great about it is that American Airlines accepts it. And that’s what’s powerful. To stand next to us, not behind us or in front of us, means the world.”

TeeTee Perez started the PRIDE Employee Resource Business Group chapter in Miami in 2017.

TeeTee, second from left, joined fellow PRIDE team members at an event the group hosted to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall raid.