American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

# As Cargo turns 75, team members reflect on the ‘best kept secret’

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It was a rainy day in New York and two of American Airlines Cargo’s most tenured team members, Dorothy Coaker

and Dolisa Green, reminisced over a photo album in Dorothy's office at John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK).

Dolisa pointed to a photograph of another team member. "Oh my goodness, he looks so young. I'm going to have to send this one to him."

As Cargo celebrated its 75th anniversary Oct. 15, it was fitting that Dolisa, a Customer Service Manager, and Dorothy, Gateway Customer Service Coordinator, reflected on the people and memories that paved the way. The two share a combined 92 years of experience with the airline, including more than 50 years in Cargo.

In addition to the first scheduled cargo flight, American has a long list of innovations that put them at the forefront of the air cargo industry. American was the first carrier to use containers designed specifically to safely transport pets. It was also the first to use time-saving cargo containers, called unit load devices, which allow crews to get cargo into planes faster and helps make sure your flight takes off on time.

But innovations and technologies are created by people. For Dorothy and Dolisa, the unique comradery among the Cargo team helps make the company an industry leader.

Dorothy recently celebrated 50 years at American, but she said she has more energy than ever. Described by her manager as an "American delight," Dorothy — a lifelong New Yorker — has an endless repertoire of stories to tell, like the time she talked to actor Cary Grant, who she described as "a lovely, lovely man."

Initially working in reservations, Dorothy opted to move to a part-time position in New York when the office moved to Hartford, Connecticut to stay in New York City with her children. When a full-time opportunity opened in Cargo at JFK, she jumped at it.

"When I came to Cargo 39 years ago, I found my home. The people here are fabulous, we're such a family," Dorothy said. "We've done a lot of crying and a lot of laughing. Because with great people, you miss them when they leave."

There's no questioning Dolisa's passion for Cargo, and her love for the industry is just as strong today as it was on her first day as a key-punch operator for TWA in 1977.

Now a Cargo Customer Service manager at JFK, Dolisa wishes she would have joined the Cargo team earlier in her career. She spent the first 29 years working for TWA in Kansas City and St. Louis before joining the American family in New York.

Dolisa joked that everyone has their own "rite of passage" after joining the Cargo team. For her, it happened when she had to pick up a pair of orangutans from South African Airways for a transfer to a flight bound for Miami

International Airport (MIA). It also happened to be her first time on the ramp at JFK – in the middle of the night.

“I was so nervous. I finally realized I was lost when I said, ‘Oh, those are airplanes. I’m getting close to the runway. I better turn around,’” Dolisa laughs. “But it worked out and we got them onto their flight to Miami.”

The two are proud of the progress that American has made in diversifying its culture. Dorothy credits Terri Naglitsch, the first female team member in Cargo, when she thinks about the strides Cargo has made in becoming a diverse workgroup.

“We have a lot of female clerks now and they’re just as good at working forklifts and moving freight as those guys,” Dorothy said. “Half our MODs (managers on duty) are female. It’s truly people helping people.”

Today, Cargo continues to find ways they can serve customers in innovative ways. On Oct. 1, 2019, the division rolled out the first phase of Project Payload. The plan marks the biggest software overhaul in Cargo’s history. The new system modernizes operations and provides a more user-friendly booking website for customers.

“We’ve been named [cargo] airline of the year for a number of years now, so we’ve got quite a record that we have to keep up,” Dorothy said. “So we’re stepping up and being visible inside and outside of the company.”

Dorothy Coaker
Years at American: 50
Years in Cargo: 39

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“Cargo is an important part of society. People have to get things from point A to point B. We have a lot of responsibility, and it’s great that we get to do it with wonderful people.”

Dolisa Green
Years at American: 42
Years in Cargo: 16

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“Cargo is like a hidden secret within the company because a lot of people who work for the airline don’t know it exists, and it’s an exciting place to work.”