American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

# Building a community of inclusivity

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O'Hare International Airport (ORD) Flight Service Manager David Cox has spent more than a decade trailblazing a path that connects American and the LGBTQ community in Chicago. He co-founded the ORD chapter of American's Pride Employee Business Resource Group (EBRG) representing LGBTQ team members and their allies in 2010, and since then, he's built meaningful partnerships with local organizations to reinforce American's commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity.

In addition to his day job of supporting almost 150 flight attendants, David serves as the Global Lead for the Pride EBRG and oversees 21 Pride chapters spanning the United States, Europe and South America. He's passionate about the group's collective mission to educate others and advocate for LGBTQ issues. "We will continue raising awareness until the world recognizes that gay rights are human rights," David said.

David believes there are parallels to the current demonstrations protesting systemic racism and injustice African Americans experience with the Stonewall riot of 1969 — when police brutality toward patrons of Stonewall, a gay bar in Manhattan, sparked a movement and marked a turning point for the struggle for gay rights.

"Whether you're discriminated against by race, religion or sexual orientation, every group's struggles intersect at equal rights," David said. "The older generation paved our way and we have to continue building on that progress. In the beginning, the LGBTQ community just wanted the right to be open in public without fear of reprisal. Then we fought for gay marriage. Once you have success, you have to keep pushing forward for more."

One year after Stonewall, activists led the first of what is now known as a gay pride parade. Since then, pride parades have been a symbol of celebration of the LGBTQ rights movement and largely observed in June, which has been designated as Pride Month. This year, parades throughout the world are canceled due to the coronavirus

(COVID-19) pandemic, leaving a void for the LGBTQ community and its allies during Pride Month. But American's Pride EBRGs are celebrating virtually, using video conferencing and other online platforms.

"When I march in the pride parade, it's like saying to the world, 'This is who I am and I'm proud of it,'" David said. "But it's also an honor to commemorate what took place during the Stonewall riots. All of that can't stop because of the pandemic, so we're just celebrating the way we can right now."

A respected member of the community, David spearheaded American's partnerships with the Center on Halsted and Howard Brown Health, two organizations dedicated to the health and well-being of LGBTQ people in the Chicago area. Both organizations became beneficiaries of funds from American's Regional Council, which supports organizations that are important to team members and critical to the local community. David brought his mission to life by engaging with hundreds of people in youth and senior programs and rallying team members to various volunteer events. Of note, David and Pride EBRG planned and produced the **Center on Halsted's 2019 Youth Prom**, an inclusive prom night for young adults in the LGBTQ community.

David believes learning about other people's experiences will bring everyone closer, which is why he started the Pride EBRG's annual diversity seminar in Chicago to focus on transgender awareness. The seminar educates attendees on issues that will help them better understand American's transgender customers and colleagues. The seminar featured team members and representatives from the Center on Halsted, Howard Brown Health and a new partner, GenderCool, that highlights transgender teens to help people understand transgender and non-binary kids.

Looking back on the last ten years, Franco Tedeschi, American's Vice President of Operations in Chicago, Europe and Asia, remembers when David started the Pride EBRG at ORD.

"I'm proud of David's leadership and all that he's done to create a strong relationship between American and the LGBTQ community in Chicago," Franco said. "Even more so, I'm proud of his commitment and ability to inspire others by his own actions."

David is a 2018 recipient of American's highest honor, the Chairman's Award, and he accepted the Center on Halsted's Corporate Spirit Award in 2019 on behalf of the ORD Pride EBRG. His fellow team members are inspired by his passion to connect people and celebrate their differences, and David says that's the key to creating community. "Maybe my greatest accomplishment is being part of a wonderful team that I rely on to accomplish collective change."

David recalls a time in his life when he didn't feel accepted by society for being a gay man. He shares his experience with others, so they can appreciate the struggles felt by the LGBTQ community and push forward for change.

“I’m proud to be part of an airline where I know I can be myself every day. The little things American does to embrace its team members mean so much when you were not afforded the same respect at other points in your life.”

David Cox is a flight service manager and Pride EBRG global lead at American Airlines.

David (on the right) accepts the Center on Halsted’s 2019 Corporate Spirit Award on behalf of American and the ORD Pride EBRG

David and his husband Francisco at a family wedding in France.