American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Generations of aviators

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First Officer Mike DeWalt first knew he wanted to be a pilot at the age of eight. His father, a 26-year career naval aviator, consciously took the time to bring his four sons onboard his aircraft when he could, instilling a love of aviation in his kids from the very beginning. Thanks to those inspirational trips to the flight deck, DeWalt and two of his brothers followed closely in their father's footsteps, taking on long naval careers before eventually taking a leap of their own into commercial aviation.

"My father has always inspired me," DeWalt said. "But after an almost 28-year career as a naval aviator and a communications officer, I wanted to transition my flying skills into the commercial aviation industry and was fortunate enough to do so here at American Airlines."

Mike DeWalt may be the newest DeWalt pilot to join the team, but he takes a lot of pride in being part of the American family, which includes two actual family members of his own. His older brother, Rod, is a Boeing 737 Captain based out of Dallas-Fort Worth, while his younger brother, Chip, is a 737 First Officer based out of Washington, D.C.

Even though the DeWalt brothers are on very different schedules, their paths do sometimes cross. Just this month, by complete surprise, all three brothers happened to run into each other at Miami International Airport and stopped for a quick catch-up.

"When we're able to get everyone together, family gatherings make for some great flying stories," added DeWalt. "My brothers and I are very close, and we were fortunate enough to have each other growing up — and now during our time here at American."

Another new hire, Paige Rogers, a 737 First Officer, also developed a love of flying at a young age, thanks to her

mom, who was an American Captain at the time.

“When I was really young, I would tell everyone that I wanted to be a pilot,” said Rogers.

Then, after 9/11 and more challenging years for the airline industry that lessened the need for new pilots, Rogers changed course and instead directed her focus on a career in medicine. Eventually, Rogers graduated from the University of Georgia with degrees in biology and psychology, but her passion for aviation remained top of mind.

In fact, while studying for the MCAT, she took a break to visit a local flight school for a lesson.

“I knew after that flight that I was supposed to fly,” said Rogers. “I had my private license before I had my MCAT score, and I've never looked back. Luckily, by that point, the airlines had really gained back the momentum they had previously lost.”

Of course, her past as a pilot’s child played a huge role in her path to American. Her mom, Captain Beverley Bass, famously known as the pilot whose plane diverted to Gander, Canada on 9/11, as portrayed in the Broadway musical Come From Away, never stopped cheering her on.

“Having a parent in the industry obviously has huge advantages,” explained Rogers. “I knew right off the bat what a life with this job looked like. As important as my career is to me, having a family is equally as important. My mom proved to me that you can have both.” Rogers is keenly aware that her mother faced many challenges throughout her career as one of the first females in a traditionally male-dominated role.

“There's not a day that goes by that I don't appreciate all the women that faced those barriers head on so girls like me could follow in their footsteps,” she added. “I truly believe we have the coolest job in the world, and I can't thank my mom, and the many others before us, enough, for giving us this opportunity.”

Will Sheriff Jr., currently an American Airlines Cadet Academy flight instructor, grew up flying with his father, Capt. Will Sheriff Sr., but initially pursued a career as a professional dancer until he shifted gears in 2019.

“I may not be on stage anymore, but every time I step foot into the airport, I trust my preparation and perform what I’ve rehearsed,” Sheriff explained.

But he also knows he owes a good bit of his success to his father and the network he gave him access to when he needed it.

“Without the mentorship that my dad and my mentors provide me, I’d be far less successful,” he added. “He’s been

a pilot my whole life, so I've seen the example he's set inside and outside of the flight deck, and he's nothing short of a superb aviator and leader."

Each pilot on the American team, from the most senior captains to new hires and those who found a love for aviation later in life, has a love and passion for a job that's uniquely focused on safely and expertly flying people across the world. And for those with family ties in the industry, that love hits just a little bit differently — and may continue for generations to come.

FO Mike Dewalt (L) and his brothers Rod (C) and Chip (L).

FO Paige Rogers and her mother, retired Captain Beverley Bass.

Captain Will Sheriff Sr. and his son, American Airlines Flight Academy flight instructor Will Sheriff Jr.