American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Wheels and wings: American's two pilot training centers collect bikes for kids

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Bicycles line the hallways at American's two pilot training facilities — the result of a friendly competition between team members at the American Airlines Flight Academy and Charlotte Training Center. Each new bike, along with a matching helmet, will be gifted to a child in need. Over the past eight years, American's pilots and flight training staff donated more than 1,000 bikes to local charities.

"We're in the transportation business — what better way to give than to start kids off with their first set of wheels" said Capt. Lori Cline, who oversees pilot training. The bike drive has become a holiday tradition for the pilot training team in Charlotte, and this year, Cline challenged the academy in Fort Worth, Texas, to host a drive of its own. "I think the challenge between [Dallas-Fort Worth] and Charlotte has been spirited and fun," she said.

Every American pilot comes to at least one of the facilities for recurrent training each year. When they visit during the holidays, many gladly join in for the cause. Donations also come from retired pilots, flight training staff and other American team members.

American Airlines Federal Credit Union team members help load donated bikes into a van in Dallas-Fort Worth.

Bicycles line the hallways at the American Airlines Flight Academy in Dallas-Fort Worth.

First Officer Lorrie LeBlanc helps move a donated bicycle at the American Airlines Flight Academy in Dallas-Fort Worth.

"Without our generous pilots, instructors and check airmen, we would not be able to pull this off," said Keitha

McKenzie, who organized the very first bike drive at the Charlotte Training Center in 2013. “This is a group effort. It takes so many of us to pull it off.”

Since many crew members may not be able to physically bring bicycles when they travel to attend training, they give donations. Local staff then purchase the bikes and assemble them when they have free time.

“I call them ‘elves’ — they’ve really gotten into the Christmas spirit,” Cline said. “It warms my heart to see how many people contributed.”

The effort in Charlotte netted 129 bicycles this season. They’ll be donated to a North Carolina charity helping families affected by homelessness. In its first year participating, the Flight Academy in Dallas-Fort Worth collected more than 150 bicycles. They’ll be distributed to children through a number of local charities and police departments.

Capt. Bill Elder watched the line of bikes steadily growing at the Flight Academy and donated to the cause. “During these tough times with COVID and hopefully being on the back side of the pandemic, this is a great opportunity for all us to give back,” he said. “I think every kid loves a bicycle, right?”

Combined, both training teams collected 279 bicycles for kids this holiday season.