

Piloting growth

2/22/2022

In 2008, David Pettet started his career flying for a small airline when he was just 19 years old. He knew he had a passion for aviation. David soon discovered and joined the National Gay Pilots Association (NGPA), a group of pilots and allies who did advocacy work to build support within and acceptance of the LGBTQ aviation community across the world. There he found the support to build on that passion.

“The organization was a foundation and support network, both personally and professionally, helping me navigate my own coming out and helping me build the confidence to be my genuine self while at work,” he said. “It really provided the support, resources, contacts and networking opportunities I needed to land my dream job as a pilot for American Airlines.”

Now living his dream as a soon-to-be captain for the world’s largest airline, David is active in the pilot hiring and recruiting space, volunteering at NGPA events each year. He initially joined its board of directors as their youngest-ever board member and served as NGPA President from 2014 to 2020. During that time, he’s witnessed the industry, as well as the community, evolve. The NGPA has helped shepherd the way.

“NGPA was much smaller when it first started in the ‘90s,” David said. “The NGPA’s first events consisted of just a few dozen members only using first names and identifying themselves by wearing an aviation-related shirt for fear of losing their airline jobs or military careers. The work the founding members did then was critical to the future of the organization and pilot career field. We’ve come a long way.”

During his stint as president, he helped lead the organization from a few hundred members with a \$100,000 annual budget to several thousand members worldwide with \$1.3 million in funding. In addition to the tremendous growth of the organization membership and finances, the NGPA has developed strong relationships with industry leaders,

which gives its members the ability to provide scholarship awards throughout the year, in addition to hosting one of the largest industry expo events — the NGPA Winter Warm-Up.

“There’s no better way to give back to the aviation community than providing youth, students and professionals with the financial resources to fuel their dreams,” David added.

The NGPA also awards an annual scholarship in memory of American Airlines **First Officer David Charlebois**, an NGPA member whose life was taken during the Sept. 11 attacks.

At this year’s Winter Warm-up, American’s Pilot Recruiting team joined David and other American Airlines pilots, where they met with more than 400 quality pilot candidates and through the interview process, handed out various job offers on the spot.

“We’re working hard to grow the pilot population and remove barriers for prospective pilots, while creating greater diversity amongst the future and current pilot ranks,” said Brad Morrison, Manager of Pilot Recruiting at American. “Our goal is to bridge that gap between a student’s or young aviator’s dream to be a commercial aviation pilot by connecting them with financing opportunities for flight school through the **American Airlines Cadet Academy** program and gatherings like the Winter Warm-Up. We’re honored to be invited to such a great networking event led by the LGBTQ aviation community.”

For David, his work to promote American’s inclusion and diversity efforts doesn’t end there. He also volunteers with PRIDE, one of American’s Employee Business Resource Groups. One recent PRIDE effort involved the planning of an entire flight staffed by an all-LGBTQ American Airlines crew to kick off the **50th anniversary** of the Stonewall riots.

“I know I speak on behalf of my fellow NGPA members who also fly for American when I say we couldn’t be prouder of American’s presence at the NGPA event this year,” said David. “This company’s ongoing commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace — and continued focus on the future and growth of the pilot profession — is truly unmatched.”

While there’s still progress to be made — and American has publicly **announced** its advancement and goals regarding its companywide diversity, equity and inclusion journey — David is happy with the positive change he’s seen through the years thanks to these recruiting efforts and the support of American’s leadership team.

“As a pilot in the LGBTQ community, it is no surprise to me why we’re the only airline given a perfect score for the 20th year in a row by the Human Rights Campaign and titled “One of the best places to work.”

American Airlines pilot, David Pettet

Brad Morrison and the Pilot Recruiting team at this year's Winter Warm-Up

