



NEWS RELEASE

Meet our 2025 Safety Champions

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At American Airlines, safety is the foundation of everything we do. It is built into every flight, every role and every day on the job. That commitment is why we honor team members who go above and beyond through our annual Safety Champion Award.

On Sept. 29, 31 team members from across American were recognized as 2025 Safety Champions during a celebration dinner at the airline's headquarters in Fort Worth, Texas. These honorees represent a wide range of workgroups and locations, but they share one mission: keeping our customers and team members safe.

Safety Champions are known for their leadership, ideas and proactive efforts that strengthen our safety culture. Whether identifying risks, improving processes or supporting their teams, each honoree plays a vital role in helping American deliver a safe and reliable experience.

We are proud to highlight five of this year's Safety Champions whose contributions made a meaningful impact across our airline.

Robert Pepe — Integrated Operations Center (IOC)

Robert Pepe is a system customer service manager at American's Integrated Operations Center. He originally started with US Airways and works behind the scenes to ensure every customer journey stays on track.

At American, Robert saw an opportunity to improve how station contacts were maintained. The existing system relied on outdated technology, which created challenges during time-sensitive events. He partnered with business and IT teams to develop a modern, web-based solution that made contact information easier to access and more reliable.



By integrating it into internal platforms, he added redundancy, a key safeguard in an industry where timing and coordination are critical.

“It’s about making sure our teams can respond quickly and keep flights moving, especially in a business as dynamic as aviation,” Robert said.

His work helps IOC teams reach the right people fast, so if disruption — such as weather or a customer experiencing an inflight medical issue — happens, customers can continue their journey with minimal delay. He continues to collaborate across departments to ensure American delivers on its promise of safety and reliability.

Patrick Barnett — Frankfurt Airport (FRA)

Patrick is a line maintenance mechanic supporting American’s operation in Frankfurt, Germany (FRA). He first got to know the team while working at a vendor company back in 1995 and officially joined American in 2006. After retiring from military service, Patrick says it felt like coming full circle. “A couple of guys from American called me up and told me it’s a great place to work,” he said.

With experience at several major airlines, Patrick brings a deep understanding of safety that spans decades and carriers. He’s known for strengthening the safety culture, always looking for ways to improve how teams work and protect one another.

For example, he helped reduce recordable incidents with personal protective equipment (PPE) compliance. He also enhanced emergency preparedness by conducting fire escape assessments, which led to more efficient evacuation drills. His efforts have earned praise from external safety audits, including recognition from the local German health and safety officer for his proactive approach.

To Patrick, safety is never a solo mission. “How can I make this job get done correctly, how can I help the next guy or gal do his better?” he said. “It’s been a team effort. You don’t do this alone. I had a whole bunch of medals, but I didn’t earn them alone.”

Lowell Cumston, Jr. — Tech Ops - Tulsa

Lowell is an aviation maintenance technician at Tech Ops - Tulsa and has been with American since 1989. He came to the airline with a deep love for aviation and a hands-on approach to problem-solving. “Working in the hangar is about fixing things,” he said.

When Lowell started, safety protocols were ever-changing and constantly evolving across the industry. That experience shaped his mindset and sparked a personal mission to make safety a priority, not just for himself, but for everyone around him.

“We’ve got a lot of new hires coming through the bases,” Lowell said. “You’ve got five minutes to do it, or 10 minutes to do it right. That’s the big thing. People are willing to help, especially peers with more seniority. We want to set them on a path to longevity in this job.”

At American, Lowell’s commitment to safety is evident from the moment he steps into the hangar. He’s constantly scanning his surroundings, making sure his work area and the people around him are protected. He leads by example, especially during higher-risk tasks, where he clearly defines roles and responsibilities and trains others to spot irregularities and respond quickly.

Every scenario is different, but his standard remains the same — perform every task to the highest level and help others do the same.

Debra Walters — Florence Regional Airport (FLO)

Debra is a customer service agent at Florence Regional Airport (FLO) in Florence, South Carolina who joined Piedmont Airlines Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of American Airlines Group, in 2023. In her cross-functional role, she might be deicing aircraft, sorting cargo or assisting customers at the gate, all with safety top of mind.

“The biggest gift I can give passengers is peace of mind,” Debra said. “We take care of the details, so they don’t have to.”

With a master’s in Instructional Accommodations, Debra brings a strong background in training and education. She’s designed and led seven quarterly Station Drill Audits covering emergency scenarios like medical events, facility evacuations and more. Her realistic training exercises have strengthened team readiness across the station.

In 2024, Debra represented FLO at the Aviation Security tabletop exercise, collaborating with the Transportation Security Administration, law enforcement and airport officials to review emergency response plans. As a certified ground security coordinator, she takes her role seriously, ensuring every flight departs safely and securely.

“There’s so much training available,” she said. “If we only do what’s assigned, we’re missing out. I love that Piedmont and American make it easy to keep growing.”

Antonello Davi — Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW)

Antonello is a supervisor for ground service equipment in line maintenance at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW). He’s passionate about aviation and has been with American since 1990. A licensed private pilot, he brings decades of experience and a hands-on approach to improving safety across our airline.

Antonello is committed to advancing workplace safety through innovation and collaboration. He led the integration of GPS systems to track ground service equipment and monitor towing speeds, and helped introduce a pedestrian avoidance camera system. These technologies have strengthened safety awareness and reduced operational risks.



“Safety has evolved, and so has our approach,” Antonello said. “I’m proud to help develop tools and training that protect our team members and support a culture of safety, vigilance and care.”

His leadership continues to inspire a proactive mindset, ensuring every innovation puts people first and keeps safety at the heart of our operations.