

Caring for our military during the COVID-19 crisis

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Team members from all around the world have visited the CR Smith Museum to learn more about the history of American Airlines, and how its mission to care for people on life's journey makes a difference in the lives of its customers. It makes perfect sense that during a tumultuous time like the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, it would be the place where team members gathered to create care packages for U.S. military servicemembers so the mission can continue to be carried out.

American Airlines First Officer Cyndi Dawson helped launch the DFW chapter of 100 Vets Who Give A Damn (100 Vets) in 2016. "We raise money to give to a variety of different charities all over the nation," Cyndi said. "We have given to help our veterans and their families mentally, physically and emotionally."

When American's Military and Veteran Initiatives (MVI) team reached out and said it was planning to deliver care packages to soldiers, 100 Vets wanted to help. American also recruited food and monetary donations from the Robert Irvine Foundation and the Gary Sinise Foundation to get the job done.

MVI and 100 Vets met up at the CR Smith Museum and practiced social distancing, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Volunteers packed the first round of snack care packages that included Robert Irvine's Fit Crunch bars and letters of encouragement from all the contributing partners. Another packing event took place shortly after that, and, in total, 1,000 packages were put together for service members at military bases in Texas and North Carolina. MVI is looking to partner with other military bases in the near future.

American Airlines Cargo team members pitched in to help to make sure the gifts would make it to their destinations. Empty space on flights was used to deliver the packages to El Paso, Texas (ELP), and Charlotte, North Carolina (CLT).

“Our aircraft and crews are carrying life-giving supplies and medical equipment to those on the front line,” Cyndi said. “Our care packages are part of these supplies. American crews and planes are transporting these boxes full of goodies for our men and women returning home.”

After they get back from their deployment locations, U.S. troops are sent into a mandatory 14-day quarantine, plus a one- to two-week demobilization period, before they can go back home to their loved ones. This can be understandably hard after spending so much time away from home, which is why American wanted to find a way to help make the transition easier.

COVID-19 does not discriminate. Everyone has been impacted by it in some way. A snack package may seem like a small gift, but it meant the world for a soldier who just returned to the United States after spending nine months in Afghanistan. The soldier, whose name is withheld for privacy reasons, said, “It’s great that there are many out there thinking about us while we are deployed and as we return back to the United States. Knowing that there are great organizations and companies that go out of their way to do this is uplifting during this very uncertain time.” The COVID-19 quarantine may be keeping him stuck inside, but the gift made him feel closer to community. “Thanks to everyone who made these care packages happen. It has made a big difference while we wait to go home to our families,” he said.

Cyndi also was touched by the initiative. Having the opportunity to give back made her proud to be a part of both the 100 Vets and American communities. “I am always in awe of how one small act of kindness can have a huge impact on someone’s life,” she said. “The impact we can have when we all work together is staggering. I am honored to work, to serve with giants.”

Members of the military have made many sacrifices to keep the country safe, and American considers it an honor and privilege to be able to give back to them.

CLT team members unload care packages arriving from DFW.

Soldiers receive care packages after arriving on a flight from DFW to ELP.