

Finding strength through adversity

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Throughout Women’s History Month, American Airlines has shared stories of female team members who are blazing trails in the industry and making outstanding contributions to the communities we serve. Christine James-Villanueva tells her story of moving to the United States to pursue her dream of being part of the aviation industry and forging her way to a position of leadership.

The aviation bug struck Christine James-Villanueva at a young age. “My cousin, a pilot, would visit my family in Jamaica and tell stories of the exotic destinations he traveled to while on the job, places I’d only read about in geography textbooks,” Christine said. “Looking back, I feel fortunate that I had someone in my family — a Black person who had made it outside of Jamaica — to look up to.”

In 1991, Christine packed up her life and left her hometown of Kingston, Jamaica. Three years later, she started studying at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, and, though she planned to follow in her cousin’s footsteps, she soon discovered her passion for the dispatch and operations management world.

Throughout Christine’s 21 years with American and Envoy, a wholly owned regional carrier, she has worked her way up in the Integrated Operations Center (IOC) — the nerve center of the airline’s 24/7, global operations. From assistant dispatcher, dispatcher, operations supervisor, manager to director. After her promotion earlier this month, Christine now serves as managing director of Operations Support and Dispatch. In doing so, she became the first woman to be appointed as managing director at American’s IOC.

But Christine’s path wasn’t an easy one. As a woman of color and first-generation immigrant, her life has been punctuated by struggle and adversity.

“Though it was tough-going at times — working full-time in fast food restaurants and as a forklift driver to get

myself through college, studying full-time and feeling the need to go the extra mile to prove that I am a capable female leader — the journey has also been enlightening,” Christine said. “It was through these struggles and hard work that I have found ways to inspire and lead team members under my care, especially those who are from minority groups, to help them realize their potential.”

Christine’s commitment to helping create a pathway for others doesn’t stop while she’s in the office. She regularly speaks at school career fairs about the range of opportunities the world of aviation has to offer, including for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Christine also serves as vice president of the IOC and Flight Academy Employee Association, a group focused on making considerable contributions of their own time to the communities American serves. She said the work does an incredible amount of good, not only for the communities that benefit, but for the spirit of the IOC team.

“We take great pride in caring for the most vulnerable in our local communities, by raising funds so school kids can enjoy a nutritious lunch, providing resources for shelters that care for battered women, and giving aid to foster children and the homeless,” said Christine. “This work not only transcends the importance of any day job, but it brings about a consciousness and realization, that no matter the color of our skin, our gender, country of birth or background, we are all equal and just as deserving.”