

Sewing love in uncertain times

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As the world copes with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, American recently announced it will provide face masks for its team members that work in places where social distancing isn't always possible. Many of these team members serve our customers on the front lines of our operation — at the airport and in the air.

With masks on the way and set to arrive in the coming week, American team members wanted to pitch in and got to work creating homemade options that could be used immediately.

At Miami International Airport (MIA), Premium Guest Services Senior Manager Suzanne Peters and her fellow team members rolled up their sleeves without hesitation.

Despite having no sewing experience, MIA's premium guest services representatives found themselves on a FaceTime video call with one team member's mother. She was giving them a crash course in sewing.

"I have a whole team of doers," Suzanne said.

Before they knew it, the team had formed a production line. They were cutting material, arranging it on ironing boards, and stitching it up on sewing machines. It wasn't long before volunteers from every work group stopped in to support the team's face mask mission.

"I feel joy to be able to do something like this for my coworkers," said Premium Guest Service Representative Gislaine Berrios, who only learned to sew a few days ago. "We have to do our best during these uncertain times and this is my way of giving back."

While Suzanne's team set up at an Admirals Club, Mercedes Houghton, a Cargo Manager at MIA, was trying to figure

out what she could do to protect her team at American's MIA cargo facility on the other side of the airport.

Mercedes transformed her office into a sewing shop, complete with colorful strips of clothing that she cut to make masks. The second production line of face masks at MIA was born.

"She had me sit with her — six feet away from her — and made me a brand new mask," said Damaris Torres, Cargo Operations Regional Manager at MIA.

Coincidentally, at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW), team members started similar production with two machines and a dream. Diana Henao and Tammy Spence, both Customer Care Managers, got to work and the word spread quickly.

"We've had an overwhelming response from our team, willing to come sew, cut or volunteer to help in any way, helping us make these until the new masks arrive," Diana said. "It's brightened everyone's spirits to have our own team members helping each other out."

For team members in the Net Shop at American's Base Maintenance facility in Tulsa, Oklahoma, creating face masks almost comes naturally. These team members repair aircraft interiors, including items like nets and curtains. Debbie Mincey, an Overhaul Support Mechanic, was already sewing masks at home and donating them to medical personnel. Soon, she enlisted her fellow team members to get involved.

"I wanted to help, and I have the ability to do it. It's a way for me to personally contribute," Debbie said.

Team members at Boston Logan International Airport (BOS), O'Hare International Airport (ORD), Philadelphia International Airport (PHL), Richmond International Airport (RIC), Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD) and Reagan National Airport (DCA) also started team mask-making efforts.

At Frankfurt am Main Airport (FRA), Lead Agent Monica Bascon is making masks for health care workers in her community.

"As I started seeing there was a high demand for masks through the news and social media, I decided to gather my skills and fabric to help," Monica said. "So many of our caregivers are working incredibly hard and putting their lives at risk. I thought it was the least I could do."

Team members at Detroit Metropolitan Airport (DTW) were also inspired to help essential personnel, making masks for health care workers.

Back at MIA, Suzanne is thrilled that her team's endeavor has spread across the system.

Although she has only been a team member at MIA for one year, she believes this group effort defines her experience at American.

“The collaboration and teamwork, the spirit of helping — that is what MIA is all about,” Suzanne said.

Juan Carlos Liscano, Vice President of American’s MIA hub, is humbled by what the team has done to take care of each other.

“It makes me so proud that they have turned a simple idea into action, keeping their fellow colleagues healthy,” Juan Carlos said.

Across the network, more than 1,300 face masks have been sewn by the American Airlines team in just seven days — a labor of love in the face of uncertain times.

Debbie Mincey, overhaul support mechanic at Tech Ops - Tulsa, preps squares of material for face masks

Gislaine Berrios, Premium Guest Services Representative at MIA, sewing face masks for her fellow team members

DFW team members practice social distancing while making face masks

