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Blue Angels send off Snowball Express

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PENSACOLA, Fla. – U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, welcomed seven local families of fallen military heroes to the Pensacola International Airport before their flight to a Snowball Express event in North Texas Dec. 9.

Snowball Express is a charity organization for children of America's fallen military heroes, and the team was honored to support this event, said Blue Angel #7 Lt. Mark Tedrow.

Blue Angels team members signed autographs, presented each child with a personalized lithograph, and spent time with the children in the United Service Organization center before their flight to North Texas to join nearly 1,700 other children and surviving spouses.

"It was a truly humbling and rewarding experience to be able to spend time with the sons, daughters and spouses of those service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice," said Tedrow.

The event is a time for the families to do something fun, said April Lyons, whose husband, Niall, died in 2009. April's son, John Patrick, was excited to interact with other children in a similar situation.

"I think they're just excited to know they're not alone," said Sarah White, a mother of three.

White's son, Seth, although it was his first time at Snowball Express, said he knew just what the event would be like.

"I know what to expect," he said, giggling. "I'm gonna have fun."

Blue Angels C-130 Pilot Marine Capt. A.J. Harrell said he hoped being part of the event helped the families' healing process.

"I know the kids were excited," Harrell added. "It meant a lot to be a part of that."

Tedrow said the experience was special to him because it is important to remember the sacrifices of not only our fallen soldiers, but also their families.

"Our job as Blue Angels is to credibly represent the Sailors and Marines who are forward deployed all over the world," he said, "but today was a great opportunity to honor and represent the fallen servicemen and women that are no longer with us."

American Airlines provides transportation annually for families across the world to the Snowball Express event, where children and surviving spouses meet for a weekend of enjoyment. This year, the schedule includes visits to Six Flags Over Texas and the Mesquite Championship Rodeo.

The mission of the Blue Angels is to enhance Navy recruiting, and credibly represent Navy and Marine Corps aviation to the United States and its Armed Forces to America and other countries as international ambassadors of good will. The team is currently in winter training and will begin the 2012 show season mid-March.

-Blue Angels-



111209-N-DI587-044 PENSACOLA, Fla. (Dec. 9, 2011) U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, Public Affairs Officer Lt. Katie Kelly, from Elgin, Ill., talks with a family at Pensacola International Airport's United Service Organization center before their flight to North Texas to attend a Snowball Express event Dec. 9. Snowball Express is a charity organization for the children of America's fallen military heroes that provides an annual all-expense paid trip for a weekend of enjoyment. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Rachel McMarr)



111209-N-DI587-062 PENSACOLA, Fla. (Dec. 9, 2011) U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, Aviation Ordnanceman 2nd Class David Schooley, from Easton, Penn., talks with April and John Patrick Lyons at Pensacola International Airport's United Service Organization center before their flight to North Texas to attend a Snowball Express event Dec. 9. Snowball Express is a charity organization for the children of America's fallen military heroes that provides an annual all-expense paid trip for a weekend of enjoyment. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Rachel McMarr)



111209-N-DI587-161 PENSACOLA, Fla. (Dec. 9, 2011) U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, #7 Pilot Lt. Mark Tedrow, from Pittsburgh, greets a child of a fallen military hero on board a chartered plane decorated by Snowball Express and sponsored by American Airlines at Pensacola International Airport. Snowball Express is a charity organization for the children of America's fallen military heroes that provides an annual all-expense paid trip for a weekend of enjoyment. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Rachel McMarr)