

Snowball Express Carries Gold Star Families to Annual Event

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From Navy Installations Command Public Affairs

WASHINGTON (NNS) -- The Snowball Express left the terminal Dec. 11 for a fun-filled week in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, for families of service members who have died while on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001.

The Snowball Express is an all-expense paid weekend full of memories, support, and fun for Navy Gold Star (NGS) families.

"It is a chance for the children, and a parent or guardian, to come to the Dallas/Fort Worth area and get an incredible opportunity to find support," said Corcynthia Williams, installation NGS coordinator for Southeast region.



Retired Chief Petty Officer Venner Milewski says goodbye to children boarding an American Airlines flight during the annual Snowball Express event at Norfolk International Airport. Snowball Express benefits the families of fallen service members by flying them to Dallas for four days of recreational activities. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Adam Austin/Released)

Children ages 5-18, some who have been attending since the inaugural Snowball Express in 2005, enjoyed events including hospitality rooms with various themes, dinner and a concert with Gary Sinise at Naval Air Station/Joint Reserve Base, Fort Worth, a visit to Perot Museum, a zoo visit, the Sheriff's Posse Ranch, and the Snowball Express Talent Showcase Show, added Williams.

According to Williams, American Airlines is a major sponsor of the event and chartered nine aircraft, fully decorated, to transport participating families to the Dallas/Fort Worth area. They went to 27 different cities for those nine flights, but made an additional 110 different flights out of 75 additional cities that touched on four different continents.

"Just seeing the joy on the kids' faces was absolutely amazing, and they made such amazing friendships throughout the entire time," said Williams.

More than 800 volunteers helped entertain the children for the weekend and brought new adventures and memories to those families who had lost love ones, added Williams.

"It gives them an opportunity to create lasting memories with each other and with someone that has shared a similar circumstance," said Williams. "It lets them know that their mom or dad, a military hero, is going to be remembered every single day of the year by these volunteers."

According to Williams, Navy family members involved are extremely excited with the NGS program and look forward to the Navy's long-term support and guidance.

"This year's Snowball Express was a fantastic opportunity to meet with survivors in a fun setting and to ensure they know about the coordinator within their area," said Lisa Bauch, Navy Installation Command's NGS program analyst. "We hope to increase Navy participation in events like this in the future and to continue to ensure that the families of our lost Sailors are honored and their loved ones' sacrifices are never forgotten."

Of the 1,639 individuals who attended this year's event, 1,015 were children. These individuals represent 620 families from all branches of service. Children listed on a DD-1300 (Report of Casualty) are eligible for participation, with families that have never before joined the Snowball Express given priority to attend.

For more information about the snowball express visit www.snowballexpress.org.

For more information on the Navy gold Star program visit, <http://www.navygoldstar.com/>.

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