



A Newsletter to Connect CWA Passenger Service Professionals

This is the CWA Agents Connected newsletter. CWA represents over 20,000 passenger service and fleet service employees at American Airlines, including mainline American Airlines and regional carriers Piedmont and Envoy. In this newsletter we cover stories of interest to agents at all three airlines. If you'd like to suggest a story or share a picture of you and your co-workers taking action to build our union, email us at info@cwaagents.org.

Winter 2021

Education Scholarships for 250 CWA Agents

A total of 250 passenger service agents received scholarships from the CWA National Education and Training Trust (CWA/NETT) in the past few months. The agents took advantage of the funds to pursue new knowledge and brush up on valuable skills. The courses were wide-ranging, from Spanish and sign language to psychology, grant writing, real estate, sales, and investing.

We asked some agents to share a little about their learning experiences. **Tawanna Johnson** of Local 3651 took Spanish. "I enjoyed the course, and it has helped me dialogue with our Spanish-speaking clientele much better," she said. "I am still studying and hope to be fluent in a few years. I appreciated this course very much."

Eva Cook of Local 13000 completed a real estate course while on furlough, and liked the fact that it was self-paced. "I really appreciate the opportunity that was given to take such a course. I loved that it was challenging and thoughtful," said Eva. And **Jose Andrade** of Local 3641

used his scholarship to improve his professional sales skills. "This was an amazing opportunity," said Jose. "I am very thankful for the experience."

Kevin Celata, our Member Benefits and Facility Services Administrator, who oversees the union's e-learning programs, said he and CWA Secretary-Treasurer Sara Steffens are pleased to have been able to fund the scholarships and help so many members during such a tough year for everyone.

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LEARNING CENTER

Putting Health & Safety First in the COVID-19 Era

It's been a year since the global COVID-19 pandemic began turning our industry and our lives upside down, and CWA airline agents have been on the front lines at stations across the country. Throughout this period, CWA has met with the airlines to discuss safety concerns, including pandemic leave, attendance points, quarantine, cleaning, contact tracing and increasing incidents of airport rage as a result of the mask mandates implemented to keep our members safe.

Our locals' safety committees have already played a crucial role in helping agents navigate through this difficult period. At CLT in Charlotte, for example, the executive board of Local 3645 has been developing an email system to help in reporting members' concerns on all safety-related topics, with a lot of focus on how to manage social distancing. CWA and American Airlines have launched a joint effort to ensure COVID-19 compliance through station inspections. We encourage anyone with questions or concerns to send the details to our **CWA Airline Agents email address: info@american-agents.com**

Our Members Speak Out

Recently we had a chance to talk to some American and Piedmont agents who have been in the trenches, dealing with COVID-19 and other health and safety issues for the past twelve months. For the most part, they say they've seen some improvements in the ability of workers and management to cope with the "new normal," but serious hurdles remain in 2021.

Roni Clark, a 13-year Piedmont Airlines veteran who works as a ramp agent in Charlotte, says her biggest safety concerns are still around COVID-19, especially when break rooms become too crowded or equipment isn't properly wiped down after each use.

"I take care of myself," says Roni, "and I bring my own wipes and cleaning products. We get a lot of alerts in our email about our fellow workers getting COVID, and that makes me think the airport is a hotspot because there are so many people coming in and out. People believe it won't happen to them, so they still huddle together without masks."

Local officers have tried to get tents set up as alternative spaces, but issues related to lighting, noise, and heating in cold weather are slowing their progress. Roni says she appreciates all the efforts of the 3645 leadership team, but she'd like to see more support from management. "If workers see management stepping up, we'll be more likely to follow."

In Boston, customer service coordinator **Fidel Gamero** has worked for American Airlines for 11 years. He told us that passenger confusion is a major problem, especially because COVID-19 regulations change so often now. "Many international travelers are not really prepared and don't have the paperwork required. Each country has different requirements. When we let people know what's missing in their paperwork or that their negative test result doesn't fall within the right window, they get upset."

But Fidel adds that a lot of people are grateful for the help agents provide, and he sees fewer angry passengers these days. "When they see you're not trying to just send them home, they say thank you."

Patrick Fay, an agent at BOS with 35 years of service for American and US Air under his belt, agreed that 99 percent of people go through the airport without a problem. In the case of passengers who become angry or upset, Patrick blames "misinformation, disinformation, and even sometimes too much information." He says people are overwhelmed with details around COVID-19, and he tries to let them know they simply have to wear a mask and put it on properly.

"Sometimes there's a feeling of entitlement, and people don't want to wear their masks, but I think it's important to remain calm. I tell them 'look, if I have to wear one, you have to wear one, okay?'" He adds that generally supervisors back agents up in problem cases.

Patrick tries to be a mentor to younger agents, letting them know how to de-escalate situations and not take the stresses of the job home with them. He also tells them to appreciate the value of their union contract. "I want the younger generation to know that we're lucky to have a contract, especially in these times."

Debbie Bergeron, another Boston agent, echoed Fidel and Patrick, when she said that customers are not as well-informed as they could be. She tends to see the most belligerence from passengers who haven't educated themselves about the rules before they show up for their flights. "With those customers, the respect is often not there. We are all human and this should be reciprocated. This is when we sometimes feel unsafe."

On the question of COVID risks and safety, Debbie says she is seeing more mask compliance lately, and if passengers don't have the correct type of mask, they will usually take one provided by the airline and wear it.

Debbie says she feels generally safe at work these days because of the plexiglass installed at various points and the fact that passengers scan their own boarding passes, so no one is passing germs from one person to another. If the break room looks crowded, the agents find alternate areas so they don't risk spreading germs.

Debbie summed up the feeling of all the agents we talked with when she said it's still a struggle to make sure that all passengers and all agents from reservations to the ticket counters to the gates are on the same page with the same information—and that's really not always the case. "Some days, things are better than others, just like anywhere else in the world."

More News

CDC Issues Mask Mandate

We all got an important piece of good news from Washington, DC, in late January when the Centers for Disease Control issued a strong federal mask mandate with fines for those who refuse to comply. “People must wear masks that cover both the mouth and nose when awaiting, boarding, traveling on, or disembarking public conveyances. People must also wear masks when entering or on the premises of a transportation hub in the United States,” according to the order. It also spells out the types of masks that are allowed and those that are not allowed.

A Union Approach to Health & Safety: February Virtual Training

On February 25, at Local 4201 in Chicago, CWA agents participated in “A Union Approach to Health & Safety,” the first in a three-part virtual training program for members. The training is designed to increase the effectiveness of the local’s health and safety committee to address health and safety issues in the workplace. CWA Health & Safety Director Micki Siegel de Hernandez provided an overview of issues related to transmission, testing, and contact tracing.

People Helping People: Food and Solidarity at ORD

CWA agents across the nation are helping their co-workers and neighbors survive in a time when so many have lost jobs and are struggling.

Last fall, members of CWA Local 4201 participated in food drives and distribution at O’Hare International Airport designed to support aviation workers suffering because of cuts in hours or the loss of jobs.

Volunteers masked up and proudly represented Chicago’s labor solidarity with CWA passenger service agents joining together with AFA-CWA United Airlines Local 24008 to load cars with boxes and bags of food and offer kind words and encouragement in a time of need. Donations were able to feed 113 members and their families.

If you know of other members helping out in their communities, drop us a line at info@cwaagents.org.

TELL CONGRESS: SAVE OUR JOBS!



PSP Extension Heads to Senate: Make Your Voice Heard!

On Saturday, February 27, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the American Rescue Plan, which includes extension of the Payroll Support Program (PSP) through September 30, 2021. The bill is now moving on to the U.S. Senate for a vote and needs to be passed and signed by President Biden before mid-March when the current PSP expires.

Go to this link: <https://redirect.is/m6q2pvx> to tell your Senators to pass the American Rescue Plan immediately.

The bill would provide \$1.9 trillion in relief for Americans, **including \$15 billion to help airlines maintain their payrolls through September.** It would ensure no involuntary furloughs, no reductions to hourly pay rates, continued service to all of our communities, a cap on executive compensation for two years beyond the relief, and a ban on stock buybacks and dividends for a year beyond relief.

While there is light at the end of this very long tunnel, the pandemic is still raging; relief remains essential; and we must continue to make our voices heard. Take a moment to send a message to your Senators today, and every day, until the bill passes.

It's simple and it only takes a few minutes. Just go to this link: <https://redirect.is/m6q2pvx> to tell your Senators to pass the American Rescue Plan.

STAY CONNECTED

If you haven’t visited our website for awhile, please check out CWAAgents.org. We’ve updated the “Find Your Local” section and have added several new Piedmont locals. To stay up-to-date on bargaining, mobilization, and other issues, be sure to follow us on Facebook at [American Agents Connected](https://www.facebook.com/AmericanAgentsConnected), [Piedmont Agents Connected](https://www.facebook.com/PiedmontAgentsConnected), and [Envoy Agents](https://www.facebook.com/EnvoyAgents).

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