

MEDIA ADVISORY: American Airlines' Snowball Express is on its way, bringing children and spouses of fallen military for a special visit from Chicago to Dallas/Fort Worth

Forty-seven military families from the Chicago area will have a very special holiday this year. On Saturday, Dec. 9, 2017, the special group will join more than 1,600 children and spouses of fallen U.S. military members and depart ORD on an all-expense-paid journey to Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, for the 12th annual Snowball Express. While many look forward to the holiday season with excitement and anticipation of times with family and friends, the holidays can be difficult for those who have lost a loved one — especially the families of our fallen military.

Snowball Express is a nonprofit organization with the goal of “Serving the Children of Our Fallen Military Heroes.” Snowball Express is bringing hope and new happy memories to the children of military heroes who have died while on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001.

As the official airline of Snowball Express, American Airlines is providing the majority of the air travel, and all flight crews and hundreds of team member volunteers are donating their time to participate in this special program. Eleven chartered American aircraft will depart from numerous cities — including Chicago and head to DFW.

While in the Dallas/Fort Worth-area, the families will participate in a series of activities starting with a Texas-sized welcome, including: a Walk of Gratitude honoring their sacrifice, a “knight” of jousting fun at Medieval Times and a private concert by Academy Award-nominated actor Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band.

You are invited to attend the send-off party at O'Hare International Airport for families departing from the Chicago area.

What: Snowball Express will partner with American Airlines to fly more than 1,600 children and spouses of fallen military heroes to Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas Dec. 9-13 for holiday fun.

Before departing from ORD, families will enjoy a send-off celebration with entertainment, kids' activities, breakfast service, visit from Santa Claus and a special appearance by members of the 501st Midwest Garrison

Who: Nearly 50 Gold Star family members from Illinois and other surrounding Midwest states, Snowball Express representatives and American Airlines team members. Local military and law enforcement groups including 2/24 Marines, Great Lakes Navy/Sailors, and Adjutant General of Illinois, 85th Army Band, Illinois Patriot Guard, Chicago Fire and Police Department, TSA Honor Guard, and volunteer students from Notre Dame College Prep High School.

Interview opportunities:

- Children and spouses of service members who have died in active duty since Sept. 11, 2001
- American Airlines team member volunteers including pilots, flight attendants, airport operations teams
- American Airlines VP of Hub Operations, Franco Tedeschi.

When: Saturday, Dec. 9, 2017

Event begins at 6 AM

Snowball Express charter departs ORD at 7:55 AM

MEDIA: Please arrive at the ORD Terminal 3 departure level, inside door 3F no later than 6:00 a.m. You will need to present a government-issued ID, such as your driver's license, to get through security.

If you plan to attend the send-off party at ORD, please let Candice Grose (candice.grose@aa.com) know by Thursday, Dec. 9, as we must provide an advance list to airport security. We must have your full name

(first, middle and last) and birth date for security clearance purposes, and this information must match your government-issued ID. **American Airlines contact: Candice Grose 817.907.6347**

All media vehicles must park in the airport's parking garages or lots. A media parking area for live/satellite media trucks is located at the southwest end of Parking Lot B at O'Hare. In order to enter and exit the media parking area in Lot B via the entry and exit gates, Standard Parking Corporation must be notified prior to arrival and departure by each news organization. Call the Standard Parking office at (773) 686-7530 prior to arrival and departure.

Please contact the Chicago Department of Aviation Media Relations at (773) 686-3700 or cdamedia@cityofchicago.org if you plan to film at O'Hare.