



Sharing the Gift of Flight & Hope

Imagine receiving the news that you or a loved one is in need of medical treatment that is not available near your home. What would you do? Treatment may be available in another state, but then the question arises: how do I get there?

That's where nonprofit Angel Flight East (AFE) comes in, providing air transportation at no charge to those in need of medical treatment that requires travel.

While the organization's home base is in Blue Bell, Pa., AFE serves a 14-state region that reaches from Virginia to Ohio to Maine. AFE pilots volunteer to use their own aircraft and pay for all expenses for each mission they fly. Some AFE pilots are based at Doylestown Airport, and the last passenger flown from there was in 2014.

There is no maximum amount of times a passenger can fly with Angel Flight

East, which has been essential to so many families who have no choice but to travel back and forth to receive the care that they need. Most AFE patients require air transportation numerous times over several years for treatment and follow-up for their varied and serious medical conditions. Anyone who requests a flight must be medically stable, and able to board an aircraft and fly in a small non-pressurized cabin.

When asked to share a memorable experience, Coordinator Jessica Ames had difficulty choosing among the myriad stories that "will make you believe the world is full of selfless individuals



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One of her favorite stories is that of a little boy named “Brayton” who was originally from Lancaster, Pa., and needed to travel to the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. Brayton and one pilot in particular, Craig, formed an inseparable bond. Craig and Brayton’s family actually lived within a 10-mile radius of one another, further strengthening the families’ ties. Craig would fly Brayton from Lancaster to Cincinnati, Ohio, and stay overnight at his own cost to ensure Brayton had a flight home the next day.

“My favorite moments are actually interacting face to face with the passengers and pilots,” observed Ames. “Our office is based at Wings

Field in Blue Bell, and many times we do not get a chance to meet the passengers we are flying and the pilots who are making it possible.

“Now and then, a passenger flies into Wings Field and seeing their positive attitude just makes all the hard work worth it,” she added.

Angel Flight East pilots provide hope that a patient can overcome a medical journey and come away cured, thus filling a gap that often goes unrecognized by the general public.

Ames first heard about AFE from a Craig’s list ad, which she laughs about in retrospect. She was attracted to AFE immediately, having interned with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society during her last two semesters of college.

“I had the opportunity to see firsthand how the organization was making a difference in the lives of people diagnosed with this type of cancer,” recalls Ames. “That experience made me want to invest my career in a nonprofit organization.”

AFE also provides “compassion flights” for non-medical situations. Awarded on a case by case basis, compassion flights have been given to people visiting a loved one that is currently receiving medical treatment or helping with disaster relief, which coincidentally is how AFE was founded in 1992 by Harry Morales, a general aviation pilot who after Hurricane Andrew wanted to help with the relief efforts.

With the hard work and help of many others, the organization solidified and began to fill the gap between the need to access crucial medical care and the high cost of transportation. In 1993, the first year of operations, AFE’s small band of new volunteer pilots flew 17 flights.

Today, 700 to 800 medical flights are flown each year in the Northeastern United States, sharing the gift of flight, and perhaps a legacy of hope, as well. |

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