



TRAVELERS AID
INTERNATIONAL

WE ARE ONE TRAVELERS AID.

JOURNEYS

May 2020

Fulfilling Our Mission Amid COVID-19



...in the Community

Travelers Aid at Washington Union Station received a call from a D.C. community agency requesting financial assistance to return a man to his home in New Jersey after he was released from the D.C. jail due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Discharge papers from the jail were given to the community worker, revealing that the man had been incarcerated for misdemeanor violations. The papers also indicated the man was being discharged to a "safer environment," which turned out to be the streets of D.C. Travelers Aid verified acceptance from his mother and returned him to New Jersey.



...to Assist Travelers

(Cris Furney, a volunteer at Washington Dulles Travelers Aid since 2003, was the author of "the winning volunteer story" below in a contest the program conducted during the current pandemic.)



"The year was 2007. While volunteering at Washington Dulles Travelers Aid, I received a phone call from Chen Feng, a passenger who had just arrived in Washington, D.C., from China. He had never been to America but now had been called to duty on a two-year assignment working as a second secretary/police liaison officer at the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Washington. Mr. Feng told me that night that he must attend his first formal introduction at the embassy

but the 10 bags he checked in China never arrived in D.C. "I need your help," he said.

After hours of phone calls and unscrambling his itinerary, I discovered he flew from China to New York on Air China and his bags were never checked onto his United Airlines flight to Washington. The bags eventually arrived, in time for the evening event.

Months later, his wife Zhig Xing and their son came to America to join him, and Mr. Feng wanted them to meet me and my husband to show their appreciation for helping him when he first arrived in this country.

During their two-year stay, we developed a neat friendship while enjoying some fabulous formal receptions at the Chinese Embassy. After their stay was completed, they returned to Fuzhou City, Fujian Province, in South East China, and we never saw or heard from them again.

At least not until April 14, 2020. We received a phone call from China. It was Zhig Xing; she was worried about our health regarding the virus. They, too, were house bound, wearing masks, students out of school, etc. She said, "We have never forgotten the goodness of the American people, and we were concerned about you."

Throughout the past years, I have reminded myself many times while putting on the Dulles Volunteer Travelers Aid vest that I am not Dulles Airport and I am not Travelers Aid. I am 'AMERICA' to the traveling public."



Volunteer Spotlight — Sherry Winograd

When you approach Travelers Aid volunteer Sherry at EWR, you enter a circle of light and positivity! Sherry loves spending time helping passengers and meeting new people – and volunteers several times a week! Her bubbly personality and outgoing nature are familiar to many airport personnel.

Born in Albany, N.Y., Sherry moved to Brooklyn to attend college and soon after graduation met her husband. After raising four children, Sherry and her husband moved from Marine Park (Brooklyn) and settled in Hillside, N.J. Besides enjoying time with her 15 grandchildren, Sherry also helps run a camp for children aged 5-14 in Harris, N.Y.

After more than nine years as a Travelers Aid volunteer, Sherry continues to exude the level of

customer service we all strive to give. Sherry's close proximity to the airport, and her desire to help even "one passenger" during this pandemic, made it easy for her to decide to continue giving back.

One afternoon, Sherry sat with a woman from Frankfurt, Germany, for over an hour while she waited for her husband; another day, she helped a couple from London get to Amtrak for a train to Washington, D.C.; she welcomed a flight from Amsterdam and witnessed the reunion of a married couple, and personally guided a young traveler from a London flight to her domestic flight in another terminal. These simple yet remarkable acts of kindness are just everyday gestures that Sherry naturally brings to her volunteer role!!



Member News from Down Under



(Journeys editor Ellen Horton caught up with Elias Lebbos, CEO of Travellers Aid Australia, who gave an update on the COVID-19 situation in his country and shared other program news.)

"We are doing well in Australia. Our government moved fast and hard very early. Within weeks of my returning from the states (*in late February*), many organizations and businesses were preparing for some sort of restrictions. I don't think any of us thought we would be going into lockdown. I am so grateful we did, however, as we have only had 100 deaths across the entire country.

"We have certainly flattened the curve and a few restrictions have recently been relaxed. It will take a long time to get back to some level of normality. Transport will take a while as there is a desire and need to maintain social distancing."

Travellers Aid Australia has three service sites across the country – Southern Cross and Flinders Street stations in Melbourne and Seymour Railway Station in regional Victoria. At Southern Cross and Flinders Street, some changes have been implemented in order to follow social distancing guidelines, including removing chairs from the waiting rooms.

Although the sites have not been as busy as normal, Travellers Aid remains flexible and responsive to the changing needs of its clients, including during

this pandemic. There has been an increase in assistance to those who may not usually require Travellers Aid services, including:

- Assisting people who have recently been discharged from the hospital and may not necessarily be well enough to travel on their own
- Requests for emergency travel assistance from people being released from prison
- Lounge and public internet usage by people experiencing homelessness due to the closure of many other services and public spaces.

The Travellers Aid rebranding project has been going full steam ahead for the last few months, and the new logo (*above*) has now been rolled out at all three Travellers Aid sites, including "our great new blue buggies!"

In the past few months, Travellers Aid launched its **new human resource management system, "PeopleStreme,"** now in use across Australia and the world in all industries, including the not-profit sectors. Implementing this system has helped the organization create a more streamlined recruitment and on-boarding process, making the experience more efficient and user-friendly for applicants, new starters and internal administration.

Staff Spotlight — Peter Lauten

Peter Lauten has been the Travelers Aid program manager at Washington Dulles International Airport since September 2018, after starting with TAI in April 2017 as Dulles volunteer coordinator.

Originally from Loudoun County, Va., home of IAD, Peter received a B.A. in political science from Tulane University. He speaks Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish and French, noting that, "Working for TAI at Dulles is a goldmine for practicing foreign languages."

Peter met his wife, Kafi, in Port of Spain, Trinidad, using a "bad pick-up line" that turned into hours of deep conversation. They now live in western Loudoun County with 12-year-old boy and girl twins, a cat and a dog. All are now mostly accustomed to their new roles as home school educators and students during quarantine.

Of his work for TAI, he is proudest of improving communications between staff and volunteers, helping countless travelers, and of the 2019 Tower of Dulles award, which went to the Dulles Travelers Aid program for "outstanding service to the community."



Going Above and Beyond — FamilyAid Boston's Day of Humanitarian Aid



(FamilyAid Boston team member/grant writer Deb Watrous recounts her day in late February delivering the first round of humanitarian relief to the families in the organization's care.)

Just three weeks ago, I joined my FamilyAid Boston colleagues as we set out on the first round of deliveries giving food and supplies to families who are at home and in shelters without work or school because of the coronavirus. FamilyAid Boston doesn't normally provide these items or coordinate deliveries, so all of my colleagues with me that day were volunteering their Saturday to ensure families had the food and supplies they needed.

I hadn't been in our office for two weeks, since we were sent to work from home to protect our health. The transformation of the conference rooms and hallways was startling: it was now a humanitarian relief center. We entered a hallway lined with grocery bags filled with food, personal hygiene products, diapers and cleaning supplies, each bag customized for that family's needs based on a survey that our social workers had conducted earlier that same week with every family in our care. Neatly stacked non-perishable supplies filled the first conference room, and disposable gloves, masks, goggles and four kinds of disinfecting products filled the second.

To read the full article, click [here](#).

Hawaii Tourists Told to Still Stay Away

With a \$25,000 grant from the Hawaii Tourism Authority, the nonprofit Visitor Aloha Society of Hawaii (VASH) instituted a Covid-19 flight assistance program on April 6 to return travelers who don't have the means to follow the mandatory 14-day self-quarantine — including paying for lodging and food delivery — required of incoming visitors.

The self-quarantine order was to have expired April 30 but has been extended until June 30.

Since launching the program, the organization has sent more than 53 visitors back to their airport of origin, including travelers from Guam, Los Angeles, Birmingham (Alabama) and Denver.

“The majority of travelers we have sent back in my opinion have been irresponsible in traveling to Hawaii during the Covid-19 pandemic, when they know we are trying to keep Hawaii safe from the spread of this disease,” said Jessica Lani Rich, the president and CEO of VASH, which is a member of Travelers Aid International.

Though visitor arrivals are down nearly 99 percent, some residents have reported seeing visitors on beaches despite quarantine restrictions and stay-at-



home orders. All beaches in Hawaii are closed, although individuals may cross them either to swim, paddle or surf while observing social distancing.

“Our residents had to close their businesses and have financial hardships, and to have people come here right now and want to vacation, it is reckless,” Rich said. “Hawaii is known for aloha spirit. Let us get through this hardship; then we’ll welcome you back with aloha.”

Efforts to shut down tourism, Hawaii’s economic engine, began March 17 when the governor asked travelers to voluntarily postpone trips for 30 days. On March 26, he imposed the 14-day self-quarantine for both visitors and returning residents.

TAI Aids In Return Home of Pakistani Students



Travelers Aid Washington Dulles staff members Peter Lauten and Aliza Mendelowitz were instrumental in facilitating the return of about 150 Pakistani exchange students to their home country earlier this month.

The students, who were in the U.S. on various State Department exchange programs, had to be flown on a specially chartered flight since the number of international commercial operations has plummeted since the outbreak of COVID-19. Lauten and Mendelowitz worked to get the students through the airport and ensured that they were well spaced and safely guided to the aircraft, in coordination with the State' Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and Jet Aviation.

Dr. Asad Majeed Khan, Pakistan's ambassador to the U.S., bid farewell to the students at Dulles and thanked the U.S. government, particularly the State Department, for arranging the repatriation of the students to Pakistan and for

taking care of their well-being and safety, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis.

Personal Protective Equipment — From an Airport Vending Machine!



(The following is a story reprinted from the Stuck at the Airport travel blog, by Harriet Baskas.)

In a reflection of the times, McCarran International Airport (LAS) in Las Vegas now boasts a pair of PPE vending machines that dispense some of today's most-wanted travel supplies, including gloves and hand sanitizer.

LAS is the first to install these machines, which are located in T1 ticketing and near the T3 TSA checkpoint.

What's in the machine? Hand sanitizer (\$4.25-\$6.50); 10-pack of alcohol wipes (\$5.25); tissues (\$3.50); reusable cloth mask (\$14.50); 3-pack disposable masks (\$7.50); KN95 mask (\$8.25), and 4-pack disposable gloves (\$4.50).

LAS is also home to vending machines that sell everything from Sprinkles cupcakes and Lego kits to souvenirs made by local artists, collected by the folks at SouveNEAR.

SAVE THE DATES!



The Travelers Aid International Annual Conference Committee and staff are moving full steam ahead with the planning of the 2020 TAI Annual Conference, set for Sept. 9-11 at the TWA Hotel on the grounds of JFK International Airport. We've already got a fabulous agenda in the works with a plethora of expert and engaging speakers, so mark your calendars now! More details to come soon.

A much closer date for you to save is June 19, for the TAI Annual Membership Meeting. This will be a virtual event so everyone can participate remotely, and we encourage your involvement as the membership will select TAI's new Board of Directors for 2020-2021, among other items on the agenda. Call-in details will be sent to you shortly, as we would like RSVPs from our members for planning purposes. If you have questions or concerns, please contact TAI President and CEO Kathleen Baldwin at kathleen@travelersaid.org, or (202) 546-1127, Ext. 1102.

We Need Your News!



We are always on the lookout for interesting news about your organization!
E-mail ellen@travelersaid.org with any and all items you would like to be considered for the monthly TAI newsletter.

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