

# It's Cool to Fly American

An event to help those with intellectual or developmental disabilities experience flying without ever leaving the ground.

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For Immediate Release

## **‘It’s Cool to Fly American’ Lands at Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport**

*In partnership with American Airlines, The Arc of Kentucky, FEAT of Louisville and Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport*

Louisville, KY (March 16, 2019) – On Saturday, March 16, American Airlines, The Arc of Kentucky, FEAT (Families for Effective Autism Treatment) of Louisville and the Louisville Regional Airport Authority co-hosted *It’s Cool to Fly American* at the Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport (SDF). The event is an airport “rehearsal” created to alleviate some of the stress that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families experience when traveling by air.

During the event, participants checked-in to receive their boarding passes, passed through the TSA security checkpoint, waited in the boarding area and boarded the aircraft. The program featured a presentation on the aircraft’s features, in-flight safety protocols and take-off procedures.

“It is always great to welcome this beneficial program to Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport,” said Dan Mann, Executive Director of the Louisville Regional Airport Authority. “The goal of *It’s Cool to Fly American* aligns with our SDF Cares initiative, which is to create a positive impact on our community. With this event, offering positive insight of air travel will hopefully help participants be more at ease when flying.”

This event was open to all individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the Louisville area and beyond who seek a safe, but realistic experience of traveling through a busy airport. More than 150 participants from the greater Louisville area are expected to attend the event.

“We are excited to bring the *It’s Cool to Fly American* program to Louisville,” said Sherri Brothers, Executive Director of The Arc of Kentucky. “This rehearsal will not only continue to alleviate the stress individuals and their parents may feel regarding air travel, but further help educate airport and airline professionals about how to best serve those with autism or other intellectual and developmental disabilities. Because of our commitment to those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, we’re enthusiastic about the collaboration between American Airlines Abilities Employee Business Resource Group and their regional partners – Republic and SkyWest Airlines, Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport.”

“At American Airlines, our goal is to provide a safe and great travel experience for all,” said Bruce Sickler, Chairperson of *It’s Cool to Fly American* with American Airlines. “We are aware that families traveling with autistic children have a different set of needs that can ultimately make traveling stressful for both parents and children. Events like *It’s Cool to Fly American* gives families an opportunity to practice and prepare for future trips. American offers free in-flight entertainment and a friendly, welcoming team on board. We are proud to focus on their individual needs.”

“For most people, a trip out of town is easily accomplished with air travel, but for those with autism, it can involve navigating a string of intimidating experiences, from airport security procedures, moving sidewalks and boarding tunnels to unfamiliar noises and a multitude of strangers,” said Deborah Morton, Executive Director FEAT of Louisville. “But thanks to the Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport, American Airlines and the ARC of Kentucky, the key to success is through preparation and practice. They’ve opened up the doors for our families to do just that. FEAT of Louisville is thrilled to collaborate with these partners as we work together to make all areas of our city accessible to our families.”

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