

Commission on Human Rights

Delta Airlines and KY Human Rights Commission display Gallery of Great Black Kentuckians for Delta Employees at Cincinnati/Northern KY Airport

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Delta Airlines In-Flight Service and Flight Operations teams working with the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights has created a large exhibit highlighting Kentucky African American professionals and leaders in honor of Black History Month. A portion of the Gallery of Great Black Kentuckians, which is produced by the state human rights commission, is on display for an indefinite period in the secured Delta employee lobby at the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport in Covington, Ky.

The 15-by-15 foot display showcases 51 biographical and photographic posters of African American Kentuckians who have served as role models for their outstanding achievements or who have played significant roles in Kentucky history. Many are people who broke racial barriers or overcame great odds to become the first African American to make achievements in their particular area of expertise.

The exhibit was initially on display for the Black History Month of February, “but when Delta pilots and flight crews from around the nation learned of the exhibit, they requested Delta leave the exhibit up until they fly through Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky and can see the exhibit for themselves,” said Kentucky Commission on Human Rights Commissioner Robert Asseo. Commissioner Asseo of Florence, Ky., is a Delta Airlines Field Service Manager at the airport.

“The success of the display has really been huge,” Asseo said. “It is the first time this has been done in a local airport, and when Delta distributed the news and a photo of the display, nationally, feedback started pouring in,” he said.

“So many people have come to us and said ‘thank you for doing this’ and that ‘recognizing these leaders is very important,’” he said.

One of those featured on the exhibit is Willa Brown, of Glasgow, Ky., a pioneering aviator who earned her pilot's license in 1937, making her the first African American woman to be licensed in the United States. In 1941, she became the first African American officer in the Civil Air Patrol (CAP).

Asseo received an email from an Orlando, Fla., Delta colleague who wanted to know more about the large exhibit and mentioned that his aunt from Kentucky was a famous pilot. "As it turned out, it was Willa Brown and I told him that her poster is right here," Asseo said.

Delta Airlines Base Manager Christy Blackburn authorized Commissioner Asseo and a team of enthusiastic Delta colleagues to create the exhibit, he said.

"It all started when we were talking about the importance of diversity and how we should recognize our Kentucky African American leaders during Black History Month," he said. Blackburn and Delta loved the idea, he said, and the team created the large exhibit that is being seen by Delta employees who come through the airport from all over, he said.

There are 390 Delta flight attendants and 200 Delta pilots living in the Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky region. In addition, Delta pilots and flight crews from around the nation and beyond see the exhibit when they arrive at the airport.

"It is not open to the public and is secured, but, you know, we hope others will want to do the same thing or will have other ideas, and we hope it will have a snowball effect so that airlines and companies all over might start doing things like this to educate others," Asseo said.

Asseo was the first Kentuckian of Hispanic heritage to be appointed to the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights. He has served on the commission for nine years. The commission board rules on discrimination complaints for the Commonwealth of Kentucky and promotes civil rights through education and outreach.

For more information about the Delta Airlines exhibit, contact Commissioner Robert Asseo at 859.866.2875. For more information about the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, call commission headquarters in Louisville, Ky., at 1.800.292.5566.

