

Gold Star Mission

This story is authored by Brandon Beard, Mgr. MX Ops Center Technical Support, Technical Operations.

Southwest Airlines has a long-standing commitment to supporting the brave military men and women who have served our country. As we close out the month of November and reflect on both Veterans Day and the season of Thanksgiving, we honor all of those who have served and give thanks to veterans for their sacrifices.

Last month, we had the opportunity to do just that by completing a Gold Star Mission to send a uniform shadow box home to a fallen soldier's family. In October, I posted a message on an Employee Facebook page to see if anyone was available to help escort the uniform of a fallen soldier home to his family, the Burgess family. Soldier Burgess' uniform was mounted in a shadow box by a soldier that had served in Burgess' platoon, and the shadow box had to be transported from Nashville to San Diego.



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Employee Facebook message posted by Brandon Beard. When MDW Flight Attendant Tim Mullen saw my message, he immediately responded. As an Army Veteran, he felt compelled to do whatever he could to help transport the uniform shadow box home. The initial request was a curbside-to-curbside delivery, but this special occasion deserved much more. Though Tim's time in the military ended years ago, a soldier's service to their country and their fellow soldiers endures. Tim felt it was his duty to make this a memorable experience for this Gold Star Family, so he put together a mission plan that required excellent coordination between departments to make this happen.

In Tennessee, Tim helped coordinate a Sending Home ceremony to receive the uniform shadow box where Patriot Guard Riders, American Legion Riders, and community supporters were in attendance. Seana Arrechaga, the wife of another fallen soldier, presented the uniform shadow box for transfer.



Photo of Seana

Arrechaga, the wife of another fallen soldier, at the Sending Home ceremony in Tennessee. With coordination from MDW Inflight Base Manager Corey Opoka, Tim surprised Seana with the opportunity to join him in the escort of the uniform shadow box from Nashville to San Diego. Special thanks to Tech Ops Aircraft Maintenance Technician Ryan Hicks, who also volunteered to escort the shadow box. Upon arrival in San Diego, a Shadow Box Presentation ceremony was held at the USS Midway Museum, where the Burgess family received their precious item.



Shadow Box Presentation ceremony for the Burgess family at the USS Midway Museum in San Diego, CA.



There were several Employees and organizations that made this Gold Star Mission possible. Many thanks to my Cohearts Tim Mullen, Ryan Hicks, Corey Opoka, Mandie Curylo, Tasha Younger,

Brandon Kelly, Shannon Gillum, Drew Jennings, the Flight Crew of Flight #1909 (John Herbert, Christopher Floyd, Soni Hankins, Gina Peterson, Hannah Romero, and Diane McLelland). Together, we successfully completed this mission through the coordination of our hearts and efforts.