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: CUSTOMER INFO III :

[more news](#)
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- ▣ [Feature Article](#)
- ▣ [Business Info I](#)
- ▣ [Business Info II](#)
- ▣ [Business Info III](#)
- ▣ [Business Info IV](#)
- ▣ [Business Info V](#)
- ▣ [Business Info VI](#)
- ▣ [Customer Info I](#)
- ▣ [Customer Info II](#)
- ▣ [Customer Info III](#)
- ▣ [HJN Briefs](#)

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Hartsfield-Jackson launches Airport-wide customer service training

By Roishina C. Henderson

The plan is to “wow” passengers during their entire journey through Hartsfield-Jackson.

Beginning June 21, Hartsfield-Jackson is launching “Passport to Service Excellence,” an Airport-wide customer service training program that hopes to reach 4,000 employees in the first year of its three-year plan.

“We want to present a consistent, [positive] message about the customer service story,” said Karen Ellis, Aviation customer service manager, who has been working toward launching a program to enhance customer service for more than nine years. “I’m so excited.”

Dallas-based FreemanGroup, which often works with Fortune 500 companies and industry leaders, is providing top-notch training to every branch of Airport employment.

Airport concessionaires, parking, customer care representatives, cleaning staff, and police and fire units will go through the training during the first phase. Beginning June 21, managers and supervisors will be trained every Monday through Friday for about one month. During the next six months, there will be training sessions offered three or four days a week. Starting August 23, 2011, front-line employees will begin the training program.

“We will focus on service standards and service recovery,” Ellis said. “The service recovery will be empowering and showing employees how they can change a bad experience for a passenger into a good experience. We want to give that ‘wow’ factor, so customers leaving our Airport will have had an extraordinary experience.”

There will be an initial mystery-shoppers assessment as well as occasional mystery shops to measure the program’s effectiveness.

“We want to see how they [trainees] are interacting with the customers,” Ellis said. “It’s to check to see what’s working and what’s not working.”

FreemanGroup will certify Airport employees to become internal trainers. During the second year, the internal trainers will take the lead over the sessions. By the third year, FreemanGroup will be overseers.

Participants in the program expect the lessons they will learn to raise the bar on customer service throughout the world’s busiest airport.

“I hope to gain better customer-service insight [and] training techniques and [learn] how to measure improvement,” said Angela Jones, a customer service trainer with Global Concession Inc., which operates stores in the Airport. “I hope to give managers and employees clarity on what exceptional customer service looks like, how to provide it, and how to help managers coach and encourage their employees to continue offering that level of service each and every day.”

Employees of the Department of Aviation, airlines, the Transportation Security Administration and U.S. Customs and Border Protection will participate in the customer service training program.

Ellis said the training program will tie into the recognition awards program that the Airport holds every October.

