

Travelers can now pet a therapy dog at Louis Armstrong International Airport

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A new pet therapy program launched on Tuesday (June 26) at Louis Armstrong International Airport, with 10 visiting therapy dogs and their handlers from the Visiting Pet Program in New Orleans. (Louis Armstrong International Airport)



By Maria Clark

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Travelers at Louis Armstrong International Airport were greeted by a troop of 10 furry volunteers on Tuesday (June 26).

The group of pet therapy dogs and their handlers were at the airport to kick off a new program aimed at helping airport visitors better deal with the stress of traveling.

Volunteers with the Visiting Pet Program, which started in New Orleans 31 years ago, will visit the airport with their trained therapy dogs throughout the week, generally for about two hours during busier periods on weekdays.

One passenger flying to Texas this week reached out to Lee Gaffney, the director of the Visiting Pet Program, after meeting one of the therapy dogs, a golden retriever named Harper Lee.

His own pet golden retriever passed away a year ago and meeting Harper Lee while waiting for his flight to Austin warmed his heart, he wrote in an email to Gaffney.

"Our mission is to share the unconditional love of the animals for people who can't have their own pets. People also miss their animals when they are travelling," Gaffney said.



The therapy pets with the program, which also include cats, guinea pigs and rabbits, visit 20 facilities in the New Orleans-metro area about two to three times a month. Gaffney said that the program has about 120 volunteers who bring their pets to places such as nursing homes and hospitals.



New Orleans Airport
@NO_Airport

Today, we are launching MSY K-9 Krewes, a new pet therapy program, in partnership with Visiting Pet Program Animal Assisted Therapy Program. Nearly 10 volunteers and canines will be on duty for two hour shifts weekdays.

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This is the first time they will come out to the airport, a process that took about two years to get organized. Gaffney said that, for now, the program is limited because only 10 volunteers have signed on to participate but they are hoping to get more participants. Only dogs -- not cats or other animals -- will be allowed to sign up for airport duties.¹

The volunteers have to go through extensive orientation and need to check-in with the airport for directions on where to go. In order to volunteer with the group at the airport, volunteers have to have been with the Visiting Pets Program for a year, Gaffney added.

Erin Burns, a spokeswoman for the airport, said they intend to continue the program at the new airport terminal once it opens in early 2019.

Passengers who happen to be traveling through Louis Armstrong Airport and are interested in meeting one of the therapy dogs should keep an eye out for a pup wearing a vest that says "Pet Me."

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