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MSP Airport Expands Programs for People with Disabilities Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyards and See-through Masks Enhance Assistance to Travelers

MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL – Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) is expanding its programs to assist travelers and visitors with disabilities, adding a growing global lanyard initiative and new see-through masks for Travelers Assistance volunteers.

MSP is among the first U.S airports to join the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program, which allows a person to self-identify as someone with a hidden disability who may require additional assistance.

“There are many travelers who have disabilities that aren’t immediately visible but still create challenges in their daily lives,” said Phil Burke, Assistant Director, Customer Experience for the Metropolitan Airports Commission, which operates MSP. “Without revealing the nature of the disability, the sunflower lanyard is a simple way to signal to airport staff that someone may need more help, more time or more patience through certain travel processes at the airport.”

MSP is now offering the sunflower lanyards for free at pre-security Travelers’ Assistance booths. There is no prerequisite to ask for or to wear them. Passengers should still arrange for special assistance with their airlines if disability services are needed. Hidden disabilities can include low vision or hearing loss, autism, anxiety disorders, epilepsy, learning disabilities, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and many other impairments or chronic illnesses.

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program began at Gatwick Airport near London in 2016. It has since grown across Europe and to nearly 10 U.S. airports including Orlando, Miami, Seattle, San Jose and JFK.

The program was endorsed by the MSP Travelers with Disabilities Advisory Committee which advises the Metropolitan Airports Commission on ways to provide an excellent airport experience for people with disabilities.

"The Sunflower program is a wonderful addition to MSP's already stellar line-up of programs that increase equitable access to the airport for people with disabilities," said Andrew Palmberg, Chairman of MSP's Travelers with Disabilities Advisory Committee (TDAC), on which he also serves as a representative for the Minnesota Commission for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.

The TDAC also endorsed a new program for all Travelers Assistance volunteers to be equipped with see-through face coverings. See through masks help people who are deaf or hard of hearing rely on seeing a speaker's lips and facial expressions to understand conversation.

"These new initiatives can be the bridge for better communications which will reduce travel anxiety," said Brian Ryks, CEO of the Metropolitan Airports Commission, which operates MSP. "We want to thank all members of the Travelers Disabilities Advisory Committee for their on-going work to help ensure all travelers have a great experience at MSP."

Other accessibility services available at MSP:

- Aira- a service that connects blind and low-vision people to remote agents for navigation or other assistance
- Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) - allows hard of hearing people with enhanced communication with Traveler's Assistance staff
- TTY – a telecommunication device for deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired
- Videophones- additional telecommunication for deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired
- Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) with access to American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting
- Service Animal Relief Areas (SARA)
- Visual paging and emergency alerts
- Inclusive restroom design

For more information, visit <https://www.msppairport.com/airport/accessibility>.

The Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) owns and operates one of the nation's largest airport systems, including Minneapolis-St Paul International (MSP) and six general aviation airports. The MAC's airports connect the region to the world and showcase Minnesota's extraordinary culture to millions of passengers from around the

globe who arrive or depart through MAC airports each year. Though a public corporation of the state of Minnesota, the organization is not funded by income or property taxes. Instead, the MAC's operations are funded by rents and fees generated by users of its airports. For more information, visit www.metroairports.org.