

## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Varying levels of service available to senior travelers

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Kalamazoo

If you are like most elders, traveling by air can be daunting.

But there is now a travel service – Flying Companions – that will pick you up at home and escort you personally to your destination.

All you need to do is get ready for the trip, then sit back and enjoy.

In addition, some airlines offer special discounts for elders. Local travel services can identify such airlines, said Micheal Koutz, owner of Kalamazoo's Experts Travel.

Koutz said elders also can request escorts from airlines. Escorts stay with their assigned passengers from the time those passengers arrive at airports until they are on board flights.

Also, the airline can supply wheelchair service from the airport arrival until the passenger is on board.

The service continues when the passenger arrives at his or her airport destination.

Passengers should request such services when booking the flight, Koutz said.

But if you want super service – such as portal-to-portal assistance from the time you leave home until you arrive at your destination – Flying Companions, based in Atlanta, can meet your needs.

Doug Iannelli, president of the company, or one of his associates will personally escort you from your home to your final destination. Iannelli said he has associates throughout the United States who can accompany elders anywhere in the world.

The service is not cheap, however.

For example, a round trip from Kalamazoo to Miami during the December holiday season costs \$2,687 for one person flying coach. That includes air fare and ground transportation for the customer and for the Flying Companions representative.

Iannelli said his company will coordinate airport check-in, guide the customer through and provide him or her with access to an expedited security checkpoint and access to an airport lounge while waiting to board.

Flying Companions also will provide on-board amenities such as pillows, games and DVD players containing movies and music.

Iannelli said his company also handles travel changes that occur because of delayed or canceled flights.



SAM KING

In addition, escorts will assist with bathroom trips and luggage retrieval at the baggage-claim area and will keep friends and family informed about travel circumstances by phone or e-mail during the trip.

Sam King, who has lived in Kalamazoo since 1977, is a native of Chicago, where he worked as a reporter and assistant city editor for the Chicago Daily News. He has a doctorate in sociology from Western Michigan University. His monthly column is written on a freelance basis for the Gazette.

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