

OFFERS ASSISTANCE TO SENIORS, INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

## Flying Companions aims to take the fear out of air travel

By Michael Milligan

Perhaps it's the crowds, the confusion, the hassle factor associated with long lines at security checkpoints. Whatever the reason, traveling often isn't as easy as it used to be.

Sometimes, it can even be so intimidating that a traveler would not venture forth alone.

That's the thought that inspired Doug Iannelli to launch an Atlanta-based service called Flying Companions.

The objective of the company, started in May, is to "give seniors and persons with special needs the freedom to fly without fear."

Iannelli recalled an acquaintance "who used to travel all over the world, but she

basically has not been able to anymore because her husband passed away. The only travel she [is willing to attempt is] visiting her son in Phoenix once a year."

Iannelli said he believed that she and others like her could be persuaded to travel the world again if they had someone to help them negotiate the sometimes-overwhelming air travel process.

After the travel arrangements have been booked with a travel agent, Flying Companions will meet the travelers on the day of departure and escort them to the airport, providing aid through every step, from check-in to boarding the airplane.

In certain cases, Iannelli or his associates will even accompany the traveler to their destination and on their journey.

"I picked a market that is growing, and obviously that is the senior market," Iannelli said.

"But anyone can use this service. It can be extended to anybody. Children who might need to go see parents who are in separate cities, or people who have slight disabilities who need assistance and want someone to travel with them. It could even be a middle-age person [seeking traveling assistance for] their mother or father."

Although Flying Companions is designed to provide assistance, Iannelli said the trav-

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eler "remains independent" to do "whatever they like."

"9/11 has definitely changed [flying], and I think I can help a person understand the process vs. being confused and maybe not understanding," Iannelli said.

Flying Companions can also help with the unexpected, such as when flights are canceled.

"Travelers may not know exactly what to do, but I have a travel background, and I can help them," said Iannelli, who over the past 15 years has worked for Alitalia and Kiwi International airlines as well as for Vacation Express and Gogo Worldwide tour wholesalers.

Since every travel situation is different, Flying Companions doesn't have set pricing for its services. All service fees are negotiated with the client. Nevertheless, the company offers a 10% commission to travel agents.

"It will depend on the whole itinerary," he said. "So I will work with the travel agent [to determine] what [the client] is proposing and what the actual whole service and package" will cost.

For more on Flying Companions, visit its Web site at [www.flyingcompanions.com](http://www.flyingcompanions.com).

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