

Cheektowaga Police unions donate \$1,500 to Wings Flights of Hope

By **Jim Herr** - December 22, 2018



(From L to R) Detective Donald Strozyk, Officer Mike McDonough, Joe DeMarco, Lt. Fredrick Roll, and Capt. Scott Pilat in front of a Wings Flights of Hope plane on December 21st. (Jim Herr/Cheektowaga Chronicle)

CHEEKTOWAGA – Wings Flights of Hope, a non-profit organization that provides free air transportation for medical and humanitarian purposes, received a generous gift from the two labor unions that represent the police officers of the Cheektowaga Police Department.

The Cheektowaga Captains and Lieutenants Association and Cheektowaga Police PBA presented their donation to Joe DeMarco, pilot, and founder of Wings Flights of Hope, at Prior Aviation Friday morning.

Their donation of \$1,500 will provide six flights through the program.

“This helps keeps us funded,” said Mr. DeMarco. “My board always asks me ‘how are we going to keep doing this,’ sometimes we get \$10 checks, or \$50 checks; it all adds up and keeps us going.”

The program, with its 20 volunteer pilots, conducts around 500 flights a year to hospitals mainly in the northeast. Flights are available to anyone needing medical attention. He says the program provides a germ-free environment for the patients and cuts out the hassle of commercial air travel.

“We walk out to the plane, and we’re in the air within five minutes. We don’t have to deal with security or have to wait to board and deboard. The biggest thing is all the germs on the plane. It’s not just the people on with you, it’s the people who were on before and before them,” added Mr. DeMarco.

Lt. Fredrick Roll is the President of the Captains and Lieutenants Association.

“I first heard about Joe DeMarco and WINGS Flights of Hope, from a few of the officers around the station. Joe was recently declared Italian American Man of the year, for what his organization has done over the years. A

number of our people also recently lost a close friend to cancer and WINGS flew him out of Buffalo for treatment," said Mr. Roll. "The Cheektowaga Police Captains and Lieutenants Association and the Cheektowaga PBA, pair up for great causes, and this certainly qualifies. We are proud to throw our support behind this charity and its mission of helping sick people getting free air transportation for the treatment that they need, wherever that may be."

Mr. DeMarco recounts the story of a local 13-year-old girl who had a pain in her leg. Wings Flights of Hope provided four trips to different northeast hospitals so doctors could figure out what was wrong with her. She eventually found an answer at Boston's Children's Hospital. The doctors there said she needed a replacement.

"I flew her out on a Sunday all cripple. Monday she was walking, Wednesday the family called me to say she was out of the hospital. I was thinking to myself how was she going to get in my plane with a hip replacement, but she was walking normal, straight up and down, no problem. She went from a girl who was on pain meds, and now she's a healthy girl in college."

"We have a great group of pilots. Some guys own car dealerships. We have three dentists, a couple of surgeons. Guys that just take their love for flying and want to go out and make a difference in somebody else's life. Some people ask isn't it said that you're flying a lot of people who are terminal, but if you see the courage they have, the fight they have, and their will to survive, we become instrumental in their fight. It's very special," added Mr. DeMarco.

Donations to Wings Flights of Hope can be made by [clicking this link to their donation page on their website](#).

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