

Eagles Wings Air Donates Services to Family of George Perry Floyd Jr.

Whether it's to help family members mourning the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, the Las Vegas strip shooting or a tragedy that didn't make such huge headlines, Dave McComb and Frank Kaiser have gotten into a habit of donating the services of Eagle's Wings Air, a transportation logistics company based in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The two did it again to help the family members of George Perry Floyd Jr., the 46-year-old man who died after Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for several minutes, with fellow police officers failing to physically intervene.

In the aftermath of Floyd's death – which sparked nationwide protests – Chauvin was charged with second-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. Three fellow officers – Thomas Lane, J. Alexander Keung, and Tou Thao have been charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder and aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter. The police officers had responded to Cup Foods, a grocery store in the Powderhorn Park neighborhood of Minneapolis, after receiving a call from a clerk who suspected Floyd of paying for goods with a counterfeit \$20 bill.

McComb, the chairman and majority owner of EWA, reached out to Bobby Swearington of the Fort Bend Memorial Planning Center in Fort Bend, Texas, who was receiving Floyd's body, to see if EWA could help Floyd's family as they sought to honor him during a public visitation and funeral at Fountain of Praise Church in Houston after services in Minnesota and North Carolina.

Floyd was first honored with services in Minneapolis, which were conducted by Estes Funeral Home, before his body was sent to his birthplace in Fayetteville, North Carolina. "The funeral home (in Minneapolis) tendered Mr. Floyd to the airport for the private ramp-side loading," says Kaiser, president and minority owner of EWA. "The passengers reported to a separate area for security screening before loading onto the flight to North Carolina."

Swearington's firm was hired by Floyd's family to handle the final ceremonies in Houston. EWA offered its services at no charge to support him, Kaiser says. "He arrived in Fayetteville early afternoon on Friday, June 5, and departed around 8 p.m. on Saturday, June 6, after the services in North Carolina that day. EWA coordinated the flight and the same tender routine for Mr. Floyd and the escorts at the airport." Services in North Carolina were handled by Buie's Funeral Home in Raeford.



While Frank Kaiser (left) and Dave McComb (right), the owners of Eagle's Wings Air, are both savvy businessmen, they also believe in helping others and donating their services for the victims of tragedies. *(Photo courtesy of Eagle's Wings Air)*

“The airlines have reduced their capacity dramatically ... so we just gauged operational capacity and the solution we needed and chose to partner with Delta Airlines to bring Mr. Floyd and his escorts,” Kaiser says.

Over a period of three days, the team at EWA easily had a dozen conference calls managing logistics, Kaiser says, with security being a prime concern. Everything went smoothly, he says.

“From a logistical standpoint, it was challenging because we had to worry about security and media ... there was special handling and special considerations at the airport with regard to the tendering and loading process,” Kaiser says.

“With all the touchpoints and the transfer, Frank was reviewing each one of them to make sure all went smoothly ... just in case someone with a camera showed up,” McComb says. “He wanted to be sure it was all first class.”

Like with any transfer right now, COVID-19 complicated matters, Kaiser says. “There are funeral homes all across the country that continue to tender to the airlines, and the requirements at the local airports are all similar: social distancing, masks, gloves,” he says. “In general, the last 90 days have definitely been the most challenging for my career and in the history of Eagles Wings Air. The elimination of capacity has been really challenging; we sent our team home the first week of March, so 85% of our team members are working remotely. At one point, we were rebooking 35% of our confirmed bookings with the carrier. Flights were being canceled two to four times before we finally could find a solution for our client and client family. Right now, rebooking is still about 10%.”

McComb and Kaiser both note they are sickened by the killing of Floyd.

“From my perspective, it was difficult to even watch it – and I thought it was excruciating,” McComb says. “For his family, it must have been so awful to see that.”

“I was upset,” Kaiser says. “We are involved in the transfer of a lot of loved ones every week, and they are all very important and we take it very seriously. In this case, I felt I had a little more connection as I knew what had happened.”

McComb adds that he found the services for Floyd very meaningful. “It had all the elements of a good funeral service,” he says. “Everything from memories to music and family interaction ... even during this time, that was what was needed.” He adds, “It was a breath of fresh air watching Mr. Floyd being celebrated in a number of different places and in different ways ... it was beautifully done.”

Kaiser watched as well, but more from beyond the scenes, he says. “I received texts and calls on the way to the airport, loading and every step of the way,” he says. “The coordination with Delta from a logistics perspective was superb.”

Eagles Wings Air has now sent home more than 160,000 loved ones home for ceremony since the company was founded, McComb and Kaiser note.