

Volunteers Offer Wayfinding, So Much More



Rick Johnson loves spending time at the Airport. His favorite hangout spot is in front of Concourse E.

“That’s where the most action is,” Johnson said. E is the busiest concourse, and Johnson has the most fun when he’s busy.

He is one of about 50 people who volunteer to help travelers navigate through CLT.

Wearing bright blue vests and red buttons that read, “Ask Me,” Airport volunteers are strategically located in high-traffic areas for passengers who need assistance.

“They have a special look,” Johnson said. “I like to make eye contact. Then you can usually tell whether they need your help.”

Johnson volunteers at CLT for three four-hour shifts a month. When he gets home, his wife always wants to hear the interesting and funny things that happened.

“She’d be disappointed if I didn’t have a good story,” Johnson said.

She’s never disappointed.

Johnson keeps a journal about his interactions with travelers, including the time a man asked him to help find his wife. She had their boarding passes, but he had both of their cellphones. Johnson was able to figure out which gate he needed to go to, walked him there and waited with him until his wife arrived.

CLT volunteers can help you find your gate, a restroom and give a restaurant recommendation. They can call for medical help, suggest a quiet spot to relax and direct you to an Airport lounge.

All volunteers go through background checks before coming on board. They also complete six weeks of training before putting on that blue vest. They learn about the history of the Airport and the protocols they must follow. They also talk through various scenarios they could face.

During a recent shift, Johnson was asked three times in less than an hour where the Airport USO Lounge was located. Each time, he gave detailed directions how to get there, gave the servicemember a firm handshake and thanked them for their bravery.

Johnson is a Vietnam War combat veteran. After the war, he worked in sales, marketing and advertising. He traveled often for work, flying in and out of CLT for more than 20 years.

Now retired with extra time on his hands, Johnson is happy to help busy business travelers, servicemembers in between assignments and anyone else who needs direction or just a friendly face.

"I think deep down, people want help," he said. "They may not want to admit it, but many people are under stress when they're traveling."

Another story in Johnson's journal is about a man he once saw walking very slowly down an Airport corridor. When he asked if he needed help, the man explained he had significant neck and back pain, but he didn't need paramedics or a wheelchair.

With nothing else he could do, Johnson simply said he'd walk with him to meet his family. Johnson told him he wished he could do something to ease his pain. The man replied, "Just being with you makes me feel better."

And that's exactly why Johnson volunteers at Charlotte Douglas, to be there for people.

To learn more about volunteering at CLT, visit cltairport.com/community/volunteer-opportunities.

https://cltairport.mediaroom.com/CLT_volunteers_helping_travelers