

RING LEADER REPORTER



RECYCLING ENTHUSIAST BRINGS RING LEADER TO SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

Native Oregonian Sheila DiPace says environmental awareness is in her DNA. “In Oregon, recycling is a way of life that simply is expected if you choose to live there,” says DiPace. Now residing in Florida and working for Southwest Airlines (SWA), Sheila continues her environmental efforts, and recently persuaded SWA’s provisioning department in Orlando to begin a six-pack ring recycling program.

“Sheila is devoted to recycling and became active in Hi-Cone’s Ring Leader recycling program in April. In just six months, the Southwest Airlines volunteers have sent Hi-Cone 195 pounds of plastic or about 24,375 ring carriers for recycling and there are 50 more pounds in a warehouse,” said Angie Donati, Hi-Cone’s Recycling Coordinator.

DiPace told the Courier that in 2009 SWA was looking to further strengthen its environmental commitments by creating Green Team Ambassadors in each station. They are challenged to innovate and create ways to make their workplaces and communities ‘greener’ on a volunteer basis without any operational impact. Sheila gladly embraced the opportunity.

“I noticed how many six-pack rings were being tossed away at the airport while provisioning our aircraft every day, and a light bulb went on. At first, we explored the option of shredding the rings, but after learning about Hi-Cone’s recycling program we realized it would be a perfect opportunity for recycling plastic rings,” DiPace recalled. She also recruited another Green Team Ambassador in San Diego, Mimi Thiele, to begin a plastic ring collection program, and this group has 10 boxes ready for shipping.

SWA flights are stocked with assorted beverages and, during the process, agents remove the cans and bottles from plastic six-pack carriers. On a volunteer basis, the provisioning agents collect the rings throughout the day. At the end of their shifts, they drop them in a large garbage bin at the warehouse. Once a week, DiPace packs the collected rings and calls Hi-Cone to arrange pick-ups when ten boxes are filled. She estimates that 25 percent of Orlando and San Diego agents are collecting.

“I’m so proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish in such a short time,” said DiPace. “Management has been very supportive in letting me run with the program, and I hope more stations seize the opportunity. Hi-Cone makes it so easy for anyone with a little time to have a positive impact on the environment by keeping as much plastic as possible out of the landfills and waterways.”