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NEWS RELEASE

Wings for All® at Silicon Valley's Airport - Simulating the Air Travel Experience for Individuals with Autism

San Jose, Calif. – City of San Jose Councilmember Raul Perez (District 3), Mineta San Jose International Airport (SJC) and airport partners welcomed The Arc of the US, The Arc of Alameda County and Parents Helping Parents today to hold a Wings for All® training for some 50 people with autism and other intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families to simulate the airport experience.

Wings for All offers people with I/DD the opportunity to rehearse the entire airport procedure to reduce their anxiety and make it possible for them to eventually feel comfortable traveling by air. The program also benefits Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screeners, airlines as such Southwest Airlines, SJC's partner carrier today, and airport personnel because they may observe, interact and develop methods of delivering their services in ways that meet the special needs of people with I/DD.

"The Arc is bringing Wings for All to San Jose International Airport – the first of its kind training for Bay Area airports. I have a stepson who has never flown because we've been afraid that he could never make it through TSA. Now, we can see if he can," said Tim Hornbecker, Business Director of The Arc of Alameda County. (**Editor's note:** Tim, his wife and stepson successfully boarded the aircraft).

(more)

"Travel and the many opportunities it offers should be available to everyone," said Director of Aviation John Aitken. "We are pleased to work with our airport and community partners to simulate the many parts of the terminal-to-airplane experience for people living with autism and other intellectual disabilities and their families. We all benefit when we fully understand each other and our strengths and challenges."

People with I/DD all react differently to the noise, crowds, long lines, TSA screening process, and boarding procedure. Quite often, however, a potential traveler with autism, cerebral palsy or Down syndrome is overcome with anxiety and refuses to perform the necessary steps. The result is the person is denied the opportunity to vacation with his/her family or the family elects to avoid air travel altogether.

"We are excited that Wings for All is being held at Silicon Valley's airport," said Peter Berns, CEO of The Arc of the US. "For parents of children with autism spectrum disorders, everyday tasks can be far more difficult for their child. Air travel can prove particularly challenging between clearing security and experiencing the loud noises and bright lights of the terminal and while onboard. This program not only alleviates the stress children and their parents may feel, but helps educate airport and airline professionals about how best to serve children and adults with autism or other intellectual or developmental disabilities in the future."

About:

The Arc of Alameda County – is one of 22 Arc chapters in California and 650 across the county. It serves some 400 people with I/DD each day offering life skills education, vocational training and job placement services. It also operates the First Step Children's Center in Hayward for preschoolers with developmental delays.

The Arc – The Arc advocates for and serves people with I/DD, including Down syndrome, autism, fetal alcohol syndrome, cerebral palsy and other diagnoses. The Arc has a network of more than 650 chapters across the country promoting and protecting the human rights of people with I/DD and actively supporting their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes and without regard to diagnosis. **Editor's Note:** The Arc is not an acronym; always refer to us as The Arc, not The ARC and never ARC. Please consider The Arc as a title or a phrase.

SJC: Transforming How Silicon Valley Travels

Mineta San José International Airport (SJC) is Silicon Valley's airport, a self-supporting enterprise owned and operated by the City of San José. The airport is approaching 12 million passengers served annually, with 200+ peak daily departures on 16 international and domestic carriers to 50 nonstop destinations. SJC was America's fastest-growing major airport in 2016, based on percentage increase in passenger seat capacity. For more airport information, visit www.flysanjose.com.