

# AWESOME AWGO TIPS



Association of Wish Granting Organizations (AWGO)  
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Hi Everyone!

First, I would like to thank all of you who attended our Nashville conference in June. It was a very memorable conference – on so many levels! As always, it was educational, but it was also invigorating, inspiring, very moving and poignant. After hours was something else – we made some “crazy” memories! ☺

We were delighted to have some new attendees join us, namely, Darby Gill from A Keiki's Dream in Maui, Ron Rector from The Dream Connection in Knoxville, Jim Lang and Betsy Delaney from Dream Come True of W. Connecticut and Regina Crites and Sue Hall from The Wishing Well in Sherman, Texas. It was great meeting you all and welcome to the family!

We're already planning for our **2010 conference** which will be held **in Atlantic City on June 17-18**. Mark your calendars now for another memorable conference! Let us know of any topics you would like for us to cover.

**Medical Travel Assistance** is the topic for this newsletter. When the parents of a seriously ill child are told there is nothing more that can be done for their child locally, and the only hope left for survival is to send their child to a distant medical facility, naturally, panic and fear set in. Insurance companies are notorious for not covering transportation and lodging costs for out of town hospital stays. The parents are understandably too exhausted, financially depleted and overwhelmed to begin the daunting task of investigating the options available to them. Because of the situation being what it is, I have just concluded my research on what is waiting for them with just a click of their mouse or a quick phone call.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Nashville 2009 Conference	1
Medical Flights	1-2
Ground Transportation	2
Lodging	2
\$125 Travel Stipend	2
Officers for 2009-2010	3

**Medical Flights** – Since I personally had heard of only a few organizations offering free medical flights, you can't imagine my surprise when I discovered what was really out there! There are wonderful, caring people around the world just waiting to be contacted by a family in need so they can mobilize their efforts to come to their rescue. There are two travel resources in particular that I will share with you since they are the most comprehensive and will assist the families in the most efficient and thorough way.

The first is called **The National Patient Travel Center** and their telephone number is 1-800-296-1217 and their website is [www.patienttravel.org](http://www.patienttravel.org). This program is a referral service which has been in continuous operation since 1991, and there is no cost for the information. The helpline is available 24/7 and after an initial screening to determine the patient's needs, then the callers are referred to the charitable air transportation program that can best meet their needs. It should be noted, however, that some of the participating volunteer flight organizations stipulate that the patient must be ambulatory and require no medical care (i.e., doctor or nurse) en route.

Time is a companion that goes with us on a journey. It reminds us to cherish each moment, because it will never come again. What we leave behind is not as important as how we have lived.

Capt. Jean-Luc Picard

If bed-to-bed air ambulance services and/or medically assisted commercial travel are needed, then The National Patient Travel Center can also assist with this search. They are willing and able to act as an advocate to help locate and coordinate the travel, as well as work to lower air ambulance and medically assisted travel costs. They will provide multiple resource options and education throughout the process. These people are incredible! In addition, The National Patient Travel Center is the only single source in the nation for full information on all available charitable or deeply discounted airline ticket programs for patients and patient escorts. An increasing number of these programs are being administered in the Center on behalf of various airlines.

The second resource I discovered is **Air Care Alliance**. This organization differs from The National Patient Travel Center in that they list the different non-profit volunteer flying groups for you, and they want you to contact the flying group directly first. If you are unable to get the information and help that you need on your own, or if you have additional questions, then you are asked to send an email to [mail@aircareall.org](mailto:mail@aircareall.org) or to call them directly at their toll free number which is 1-888-260-9707. It may be helpful for you to know that their list includes international organizations in Australia, Canada (Alberta, Ontario & Vancouver) as well as the Caribbean.

When the family reaches their destination and steps off the plane, it may be too soon for them to call a taxi or rent a vehicle. Let's see if they can find free ground transportation as well. ☺

**Ground Transportation** – Believe it or not, there is free ground transportation offered in most cities for cancer patients through medical institutions, local transit authorities, social service agencies, religious organizations and cancer organizations. You can search on the web for telephone numbers for these types of agencies in the area you will be visiting. In addition, the social worker at your treatment facility may be able to help you find phone numbers for any of these businesses or assist you with information. Some of the local offices of the **American Cancer Society** may have a volunteer network to help with transportation needs. You can

search by U.S. zip code on the following page: [www.cancer.org/docroot/home/index.asp](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/home/index.asp) or you may call them directly at 1-800-227-2345.

**Cancer Care.Org** is a national nonprofit organization that provides free, professional support services for anyone affected by cancer. Use this page to access their database to search for transportation services in your area: [info@cancercare.org](mailto:info@cancercare.org). You may also call them at 1-800-813-4673.

**Lodging** – Once the family's plane has landed, and hopefully they have free transportation, they are still not out of the proverbial woods. They now need a place to stay... This is where NAHHH (National Association of Hospital Hospitality Houses, Inc.) comes into the picture! This wonderful organization was established in 1986 and consists of more than 150 nonprofit organizations located throughout the U.S. that provide lodging and support services to families and their loved ones who are receiving medical treatment far from home. To reduce healthcare costs, NAHHH member houses offer inexpensive accommodations (usually \$5-\$15, sometimes free) during hospitalizations, before and after surgery, and during repeated visits. Their "Hospitality Hotline" is 1-800-542-9730 and they are available daily from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. EST. When you visit their website at [www.nahhh.org](http://www.nahhh.org), click on "Find Lodging" and select a state and the list of all the available housing will appear.

Lastly, CancerCare offers **an annual stipend of \$125** to be used **for transportation costs** to and from doctors' appointments as well as child care costs. Check out their website at [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) to download their application for financial assistance. (You may reapply every January if needed.) Their telephone number is 800-813-4673.

Courage, it would seem, is nothing less than the power to overcome danger, misfortune, fear, injustice, while continuing to affirm inwardly that life with all its sorrows is good; that everything is meaningful even if in a sense beyond our understanding; and that there is always tomorrow. Dorothy Thompson

In conclusion, it is my sincere hope that the above information will benefit many families who are traveling on the most horrific road imaginable. If this information eases their suffering in some small way, and let's them know that there are so many special, caring people out there waiting and hoping to help them on their journey of hope, then this endeavor will not have been in vain. I will keep all of them in my heart and in my prayers...

Kathleen B. Breaux  
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The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt.

Frederick Buechner