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STORIES BY RICHARD PEARL

AIRPORT

route to her mother's funeral in northern Michigan.

Barker, her husband, their daughter and the daughter's spouse had just arrived at Detroit Metro from Kansas City when Gerry called Burlington, Vt., to check on the birth of their first grandchild - only to tragically learn the boy had died minutes after being born.

"The horror and confusion of those moments were indescribable," Gerry said in her Feb. 6 letter. The family knew they'd have to cancel the drive up north "and try to get to Vermont to be with our son and his wife."

Flights canceled

But they quickly discovered that storms from Michigan east had canceled many flights. They needed a travel agent "but couldn't find anyone in the airport that could help us."

That was when the Barkers encountered Linda Franz at the airport's new information kiosk, near the Marriott Hotel lobby.

"Despite the fact that (Franz) did not know what had just happened to us" and also couldn't access the flight information they needed, "she must have intuitively sensed our pain and confusion," Barker wrote.

"As we stood in the middle of the terminal and made several

telephone calls, she continued to check on us over the next hour and a half, asking us if she could help or get us something to drink," Barker related.

As Franz became aware of their plight, "she acted as an advocate for us as we were trying to book flights."

"Linda was exceedingly sensitive and kind," said Barker. "She was not at all intrusive. She acted professionally and yet we felt she was helping us by sharing in our pain when we felt so alone and helpless."

"I know that the Detroit airport has received a lot of negative press in the recent past, but I hope this letter will acknowledge how the positive and caring attitude of your service agents can make a significant difference in the lives of others," Barker concluded.

Franz, wife and mother of four who just likes "to be around people," said her 20-hour-a-week job as one of about two dozen folks of all ages wearing the green Metro CSA vest "is great fun if you like people-action" - being around people and talking with them.

If someone has problems, she said, "you go all-out to try to help them."

2-way radios

All CSAs have two-way radios,

"so we're in constant contact with each other," she said. "You can get an answer instead of telling a person I don't know."

Since she began the job about a year ago, she said, she and her fellow CSAs have helped stranded travelers find hotel rooms - or try to make them comfortable if nothing's available.

"We did a lot of pillows and blankets" when the January 1999 blizzard hit, she recalled.

Franz also remembered how, together with the Airport Operations Department, CSAs helped a diabetic man stranded by a snowstorm. He'd packed his needles away, but airport personnel helped him get new ones by first finding a 24-hour drugstore and then driving through the storm to it.

Metro officials said it's CSAs and other employees like Franz - as well as Metro's huge \$2-billion expansion program that is doing millions in facility upgrades plus building the new \$1.2-billion Midfield Terminal - that are giving the airport a friendlier look.

As Katz put it recently, "We don't want to be in the collar anymore."

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