

NEWS - Agent Issues

Oregon agent's 'Freedom' trip brings 900 to NYC (10/5/2001)

By Laura Del Rosso

PORTLAND, Ore. -- Enough talk about getting America back on the move: Sho Dozono, president of Azumano Travel, Oregon's largest agency, did something about it by putting together a group trip to New York City -- for 900 people.

"The little old travel industry in Portland is trying to make a statement," Dozono said.

Dozono is one of 900 Oregonians are visiting New York Oct. 4 to 10 in an event being called Flight for Freedom.

Dozono was in Brussels for the AAA conference at the time of the terrorist attacks, and was struck by the compassion and generosity of the Europeans.

When he returned home he contacted the 1,800 members of the Portland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce with a simple idea: Let's go to New York City.

Dozono, chairman of the chamber, offered his agency's services in setting up packages to New York and urged civic and business leaders to book the trip and show off Oregon's "pioneer spirit."

"I asked them to help me lead a movement East. We have a pioneer spirit here in Oregon. This would be like the Oregon Trail, but backwards."

The idea blossomed when the local media began running reports about the \$379 packages, including air fare and two nights at the Waldorf Astoria.

Once the word got out, the phones didn't stop ringing at Azumano Travel, which is not marking up the packages or profiting from selling them.

Putting it all together for 900 passengers was no mean feat in a city that gets one nonstop a day to New York. Azumano Travel ended up using 62 flights.

The agency, an American Express representative with \$150 million in annual sales, was going through a tough period. The 26-year-old company was forced to lay off 35 agents and reduce hours for the rest of the staff to a four-day week.

Those difficult moves strengthened Dozono's resolve to make the New York trip a success.

"We have multiple messages with this trip: that we have to get back to traveling, that it is safe to fly and that we have to show New York that we care ... by filling hotel rooms and going to Broadway shows."

The group's itinerary includes receptions at the Waldorf Astoria and visits to memorials for the World Trade Center victims.

The Oregonians also will march in the Columbus Day parade in New York with banners proclaiming Oregon Loves New York.

Several major Oregon newspapers and TV stations sent news crews to accompany the group. Portland Mayor Vera Katz was booked to appear on NBC's "Today" show and other network programs.

"We want this to be infectious and contagious so that the rest of the country will pick up on it," Dozono said.