

## Sully turns hero just in time

by **Chad Graham** - Jan. 17, 2009 12:00 AM  
*The Arizona Republic*

We needed a hero.

Apparently, so did the world.

International headlines lauded the cool-thinking US Airways pilot who successfully glided his lifeless craft into the Hudson River, sparing the lives of his passengers and crew.

And more than 24 hours after the Airbus A320 hit the water, conversations in gyms and bars, classrooms and cubicles still touched on the aviation miracle wrought by Capt. Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger III.

There was no explosion. No buildings were hit. There were just images of frantic, freezing passengers and an airplane jutting out of the water.

"Veteran pilot's masterful landing creates a miracle on the Hudson," sang the Sydney Morning Herald .

The (London) Mirror called him the "Angel of Manhattan."

"He's the man!" Vince Spera, a survivor, told CNN. "He's absolutely the man. . . . If you want to talk to a hero, get a hold of him

because he is the hero in this whole deal."

Even normally snarky Gawker, the Manhattan media Web site, deemed him a "true captain" who "swept the center aisle twice to ensure no one else was still on board."

It was a welcome relief on a week when the cost of the Obama administration's stimulus plan flirts with a \$1 trillion price tag and more and more stressed Americans wonder whether unemployment lines are in their future.

The 29-year airline pilot lives in Danville, Calif., with his wife and two girls But as an employee of Tempe-based US Airways, Arizonans were quick to embrace the story and heave a sigh of relief that disaster didn't strike one of the state's few Fortune 500 companies.

"Everything has been so bad and has been so down and finally, finally to have something that actually is a traditional American story: that American know-how, that American heroism, no one died, everyone was safe," said Elayne Rapping, a nationally known pop-culture expert and professor at State University of New York-Buffalo.

It's a deeply rooted tradition in this country to have heroes who are strong men.

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"It would have been a good story if it was a woman," Rapping said. "But, I think this whole idea of re-masculating the American male at a time when there is so much corruption and disappointment in our leaders, here's this guy in a uniform who finally got it right."

Yubo Chen, an assistant marketing professor at the University of Arizona's Eller College of Management who studies social interaction, said people have a deep psychological need to hear miraculous and good news.

And, "in stressful times, people like to see hero figures."

This time, we got a real one.

One Californian Internet entrepreneur was selling "Draft Sully for Secretary of Transportation" T-shirts at CafePress.

It will be awhile before Sullenberger, 57, gives his side of the story. He's been asked not to speak to the press while the National Transportation Safety Board continues its investigation.

A spokesman for the U.S. Airline Pilots Association said Sullenberger was "in good shape physically, mentally and in good spirits."

His wife, Lorrie, said the incident "was really

a shock. ... My husband said over the years that it's highly unlikely for any pilot to ever have any incident in his career, let alone something like this."

**Includes information from Associated Press.**

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