



# AirportConnections

## Enhancing The Gateway

According to Merriam-Webster, a gateway is “a means of entering,” and that is precisely one of the key roles played by GFIA. The airport is the Gateway to Michigan’s West Coast, and we want visitors to experience the warm West Michigan hospitality from the minute they step off the plane. One of the ways we do this is through the Welcome Wall located in the baggage claim area.

When the passenger terminal was remodeled in 2000, the Aeronautics Board gave birth to the concept of the Welcome Wall. The idea was to create an environment where travelers could begin to get a taste of the West Michigan region. The Wall was well-received, and many travelers and visitors have commented on the ambiance it creates.

Since much has changed in the region during the past five years, the Welcome Wall required a few changes as well. Several features have been recently updated, and one very special feature remains the same.

As you enter the baggage claim area, your eye may be drawn to the lighted sign that reads, “Welcome to Michigan’s West Coast.” Underneath, you’ll see 13 images of the West Michigan region displayed on the mural wall. These images were hand selected for this wall to offer a mélange of what travelers can expect to find in the region – from spring blossoms to beautiful fall colors; from warm sandy beaches to snow-covered landscapes.

Located within these photo murals are two video screens that display a 25-minute audio/visual presentation of many of the sights and sounds to be experienced while in West Michigan. Included are dozens of area attractions, events and scenic locations, and each is labeled so you know just where to go if you want to visit in person. And, at the west end of the wall, you will still find the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Mural, created by local artist Paul Collins.

A bit of history, a taste of current happenings, a look at the beauty to be found within Michigan’s West Coast. The makings of a truly remarkable gateway. ➔

## GFIA Continues To Set Records March 2005 busiest month ever!

In March 2005, GFIA served 199,972 passengers – our busiest month ever! We have also set records in 2005 for the busiest first and second quarter, and the busiest first half of the year. Additionally, takeoffs and landings through June 30 of this year totaled 55,569 - an average of 307 per day. Total cargo activity also is up by more than 12% for 2005, which puts us on target to again set a new annual record for cargo activity.

In an industry that is, just this year, expected to recover to pre-9/11 passenger activity levels, Gerald R. Ford International stands strong with the potential to top our pre-9/11 numbers by 15% or more. (GFIA was able to exceed pre-9/11 passenger statistics in just one year, serving a then-record 1.92 million passengers in 2002.) We are grateful to you, the travelers who pass through GFIA each day, for your confidence and support of air travel. ➔

### Passengers



Gerald R. Ford International Airport’s passenger activity since 2000. Each year since 2002 has been a record-setting year.

## Getting Here Keeps Getting Easier

On July 14, the much anticipated extension of 36th Street from Kraft Avenue to Thornapple River Drive officially opened to motorists. One of the benefits of this \$9.5 million, four-lane extension is better routing and access to the Air Cargo and Trade Center on the airport’s east side.



Once the new \$30 million interchange at Interstate 96 is completed (scheduled to open in October 2006), the extended 36th Street will provide a convenient alternative to heavily-traveled 28th Street for traffic headed to the passenger terminal facility.

Planning estimates indicate that by 2020, 20,000 vehicles per day are expected on the route, once the I-96 interchange at 36th Street is completed. These estimates show 6,000 to 8,000 of those vehicles will be headed to GFIA. ➔

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## Keeping An Airport Flying High

Have you ever wondered what it takes to run a \$30 million enterprise? Well, in the case of the Kent County Department of Aeronautics (KCDA), it takes 123 employees whose combined skill set totals more than 1100 years experience!

The Gerald R. Ford International Airport is owned by Kent County. The Kent County Aeronautics Board, a six-member body appointed by the Kent County Board of Commissioners, is responsible for setting policy and providing general oversight. Day-to-day management and operation are handled by an executive staff comprising the aeronautics director, deputy aeronautics director, a management team, and a 120+ member staff. The airport is financially self-supporting and requires no funding from property taxes, general funds, or special taxes. Airport operations and improvements generate local net airport revenue, rather than consume valuable tax dollars.



KCDA is composed of four primary divisions: Finance and Administration, including finance, information technology, parking, and administrative support services; Public Safety and Operations, including fire fighting, police, and airport operations; Facilities, including building maintenance, airfield maintenance, and engineering; and Marketing and Communications, including air service marketing, community affairs, and media relations. The administrative offices are located on the mezzanine level of the passenger terminal facility.

Here are some interesting facts you may not know about KCDA:

- » The most seasoned employee has been with KCDA over 26 years. Nearly 20% of employees have been with us more than 15 years.
- » The airfield maintenance crew removes 83,700,000 cubic feet of snow in an “average snowfall” year. That’s enough to fill more than 20,000 Olympic-sized pools! They also mow nearly 2,000 acres of grass each summer. That’s equivalent to 1,515 football fields.
- » The airport operations staff inspects more than 12 miles of perimeter fence each day, ensuring the integrity of the fencing and handling wildlife breaches. They also ensure the safety of the three runways and 31 taxiways by performing inspections three times daily.
- » The building maintenance crew is responsible for seven buildings - including the passenger terminal - totaling approximately 485,000 square feet. They also maintain lights (1450 in all) and signs (240) on both the airside and public side of the airport.
- » The parking staff processes an average of 1,900 cars through the exit plazas each day, and their parking assist service helps approximately 150 patrons each month. The parking shuttles log a combined 345 miles each day.

The Department of Aeronautics staff is proud to provide safe, efficient, environmentally sensitive, and economically self-sustaining air transportation facilities that are responsive to regional needs. In fact, that is our mission statement. →

## Welcoming The President

Our community was recently honored to receive yet another visit from the President of the United States. In fact, this was President Bush’s third visit in the past two years. As you can imagine, while the President steps on and off Air Force One with ease, others have dedicated numerous hours to planning for his arrival. (Similar planning takes place for the Vice President and presidential/vice presidential candidates during an election year.)

Each VIP visit takes two weeks of preparation, including intelligence briefings, planning meetings, and copious communication between all parties involved. The Secret Service works with airport personnel to protect the Commander in Chief. Airport Police, Airport Operations, Airport Maintenance and Airport Rescue Firefighters all have responsibilities. The Kent County Sheriff’s Department, Grand Rapids Police and Michigan State Police also have security roles during the visit. Securing the site, motorcade route, aircraft parking and communications are just a few of many issues to be coordinated.

As anyone who has been at the airport during a presidential visit knows, the entire airport community is affected during the visit. The airfield is made “sterile” while the President is in the area: no other aircraft are allowed to take off or land, construction activity must cease, movement of individuals and vehicles on the airfield is highly restricted, and the viewing area is closed.

The level of cooperation among airport personnel, affected law enforcement agencies, and the Secret Service makes a very complex operation run smoothly, while minimizing the impact on airport tenants and passengers. And, with all parties working together, such an important event will be – uneventful. →



## US Airways Express Discontinuing Service

US Airways Express has recently announced the upcoming discontinuation of nonstop service from Gerald R. Ford International to Philadelphia International.

US Airways Express carries approximately 80,000 passengers annually at GFIA, which represents a market share of just under 4% of the airport’s 2.2 million annual passengers. Currently, the airline offers four daily nonstop flights to Philadelphia. The service is scheduled to end October 12. Philadelphia International is a hub for US Airways.

US Airways has been operating at GFIA since the 1980’s, and has a long and successful history of offering convenient passenger air service to the residents and businesses of West Michigan. Prior to serving Philadelphia, US Airways Express offered flights from Grand Rapids to Pittsburgh.

Upon the discontinuation of service by US Airways, GFIA will continue to offer a high level of service with 11 major and regional airlines, and 15 nonstop destinations. →



**U.S. AIRWAYS  
EXPRESS**



# GFIA Holds Emergency Response Drill

On Tuesday, May 17, Centennial Airlines flight 816 was taxiing for departure, when the flight crew was notified that the airline's reservations center had received a threat against the flight. The aircraft stopped on a taxiway while airline officials evaluated the credibility of the threat. It was subsequently learned that an individual, identified as a member of a known terrorist organization, had called the reservations center and indicated that a passenger had smuggled a nerve agent on board the aircraft and intended to release it if demands were not met. A short time later, the terrorist released the chemical. In the ensuing panic, the flight crew and passengers began an emergency evacuation of the aircraft.

Sounds like the beginning of an action-adventure movie, doesn't it? Not this time. And, while the airline is fictitious, the aircraft was actually a charter bus, and the terrorist, flight crew and passengers were in reality volunteers and students from three area high schools, the response was as real as it gets.

This "terrorist threat" was the outline for the airport's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) mandated Tri-Annual Full Scale Airport Emergency Plan Exercise. This live exercise allows the airport and its mutual aid partners to become familiar with their responsibilities as outlined in the airport's emergency plan within the confines of a controlled, yet realistic, setting. "An added benefit of these exercises is the ability to meet the representatives from the mutual aid partners before working together in the commotion of an actual emergency," stated Rob Benstein, Public Safety & Operations Director for the Department of Aeronautics.

In addition to the airport's police and fire units, other participants included Northwest Airlines, the FAA, the Transportation Security Administration, and 14 area mutual aid providers from surrounding communities. Fifty-five students from Caledonia, Forest Hills Central and West Catholic high schools portrayed the victims of the chemical release, many going through the decontamination process and several others being "treated" by medical personnel for their mock injuries.

There has never been a major accident or terrorist incident at GFIA in its 42 year history. However, the airport and its mutual aid partners remain in a high state of preparedness, just in case. ➔



"Victims" enter the decontamination tent following exposure to a chemical nerve agent during the exercise.

## Flying With Furry Friends

Many travelers choose to travel with their pets. Other folks buy a pet from a breeder located across the country. Both of these circumstances require the same types of special handling to ensure the safe and healthy arrival of Tabby or Spot at the final destination. So, in order to minimize the "pet peeves" that can accompany air travel, check out the guidelines provided below from the US Department of Transportation and the Transportation Security Administration. Remember, these are only guidelines – always check with your airline and your veterinarian before planning air travel for your pet.

**Start with the basics:** Cages and other shipping containers must meet minimum standards for size, ventilation, strength, sanitation and design for safe handling. (Sky kennels available for purchase from the airlines meet these requirements.) Make sure the door latches securely. Provide absorbent bedding or newspaper in the kennel. Acclimate your pet to the kennel or container in advance. If you wish to carry your pet on board the aircraft with you, the carrier must be small enough to fit under the seat. Be certain the cage and your pet's tags are marked with your name, address and telephone number. If possible, include a temporary tag that includes your destination phone number.

**Check with your veterinarian:** Airlines generally require health certificates from all shippers, so it is a good idea to have a licensed vet examine your pet within ten days prior to departure and issue a certificate stating the animal is in good health. If your vet recommends administering a sedative prior to flight, be certain to give a test dosage at home first to see how your pet reacts. Remember, not all pets are suited for air travel. Short-nosed breeds, such as Pekingese, Chows, Boxers, Himalayans and Persians, may experience difficulty breathing at high altitudes. No animal less than eight weeks of age is allowed on aircraft, and all must have been weaned for at least five days.

**Plan well in advance:** Be certain there will be accommodations for your pet at your destination. Many hotels and resorts have size restrictions or do not allow pets. If you are traveling overseas (including Hawaii), inquire about any special health requirements, such as quarantine. Book early; airlines restrict the number of pets allowed on any given flight. Try to avoid weekend and holiday travel, when flights are busier. Airlines, like good pet owners, will not allow pets to travel in cargo holds in very hot or very cold weather. Be aware that not all airlines can accommodate pets on every flight. Some have additional restrictions on animals being shipped as unaccompanied cargo.



## Presenting...

Is your group or organization looking for a speaker for an upcoming meeting? Would you like to learn more about the airport?

The GFIA Marketing and Communications Department would be happy to come to your next meeting and provide an overview of the history and operations of the airport, as well as updates on ongoing airport development projects.

The presentation is timed to fit nicely into a lunchtime meeting and can be customized to address the specific areas of interest of your audience.

For more information, or to request a speaker for your next meeting, please call the Marketing and Communications Department at 616.233.6053. ➔



**furry friends**

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

- » The next three meetings of the Kent County Aeronautics Board will take place Wednesday, August 31 at 8:30 am, Wednesday, September 28 at 7:00 pm, and Wednesday, October 26 at 8:30 am. All meetings are held in the International Room in the passenger terminal building and are open to the public.
- » Alticor will be hosting the Cattle Baron's Ball, a fund raiser for the American Cancer Society, on Friday, August 19, starting at 6:00 pm. The event will be held in the Alticor Aviation hangar. For more information, check out the event website at [www.cbbwmi.org](http://www.cbbwmi.org) or call the American Cancer Society at 616.364.6121.
- » Wings of Mercy will be holding their second annual CareAffaire event on Saturday, September 17, from 8:00 am to 12:00 noon. For more information, visit their website at [www.wingsofmercy.org](http://www.wingsofmercy.org) or call Wings of Mercy at 888.786.3729.
- » GFIA will be partnering with Michigan Community Blood Centers to host a community blood drive on September 30, 2005, in the International Room in the passenger terminal building. Walk-in's are welcome, or contact Donna Thomas, Office Administrator, at 616.233.6046 to reserve a time.
- » Northern Air, Inc. has announced the appointment of Mark Serbenski as Chief Operating Officer. Northern Air is one of two Fixed Based Operators located at GFIA, providing services to both commercial airlines and General Aviation operators.
- » Northern Jet Management has begun construction of a new 14,700-square-foot hangar able to house up to nine jets. The climate-controlled hangar will also be able to accommodate the new "high tail" jets now owned by corporations. The \$1 million project is slated for early fall 2005 completion.

### furry friends

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**The day of travel:** Do not give your pet solid food in the six hours prior to the flight, although a moderate amount of water and a walk before and after the flight are advised. Animals traveling as cargo may not be handed off to the airline more than four hours prior to departure. Your pet must remain in the cage while you are in the airport and on board the aircraft. You may be asked to carry your pet through the passenger screening checkpoint. Your pet will never be put through x-ray, but you may be asked to remove it from the carrier so that the carrier may be checked via x-ray.

While a little extra care and planning are required, your pet is likely to consider air travel with you a "purr-fect" alternative to "ruff-ing" it at the kennel while you are away. →

## Giving From The Heart



Twice each year, GFIA partners with Michigan Community Blood Centers (MCBC) to host a blood drive at the airport. Since 1993, participants in these drives have donated nearly 75 gallons of blood. On May 20, 22 pints were added to the previous total of 571 pints given by donors from the Department of Aeronautics, airport tenants and area businesses, and travelers who had an extra half hour in their schedule. Donna Thomas, Office Administrator for the Department of Aeronautics, said, "We always have a number of regular donors who take part in our drives, but this spring we had eight first-time donors – mainly visitors to the airport – who spent their valuable time participating. It's always gratifying to see those spontaneous decisions to donate critically needed blood for our West Michigan community."

Special recognition goes to two donors who reached personal milestones at this drive: Mark Randall of the airport's Field Maintenance division received his 1-gallon pin; and Ward Walters of 3DI (a consultant to the Department of Aeronautics) received his 6-gallon pin.

MCBC collects over 95,000 pints of blood each year and provides 100% of the regular blood supply to 20 hospitals in Michigan, serving a population of more than 1.25 million people. Each pint of donated blood can be separated into different components to help several people, including cancer patients, accident victims and those undergoing surgery. Because blood can be stored for only a limited time, it must be collected continually to meet the community's needs.

Join us for our next blood drive scheduled for Friday, September 30, 2005. →



GFIA staff take part in blood drive.

*Airport Connections* is the quarterly newsletter of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport. We encourage our readers to contact us with comments, suggestions and submissions. If you wish to be added to the mailing list for *Airport Connections*, please call the Kent County Department of Aeronautics at 616.233.6000. For additional information, be sure to visit us on the web at [www.flygrandrapids.org](http://www.flygrandrapids.org).

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