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Now Arriving

July 9, 2012 opened a new chapter in the history of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport as we welcomed Brian Ryks to the post of Executive Director. Ryks is just the fifth individual to sit at the helm of the airport since its inception in 1930.

Who is Brian Ryks? Originally from Lakeville, MN, Ryks received his Bachelor of Arts from St. Cloud State University. He is an Accredited Airport Executive and FAA Aviation Safety Counselor, and carries a private pilot license with an instrument rating. Ryks brings 26 years of experience in airport management, having worked at airports in Colorado, South Dakota, and Minnesota.

A passion for aviation... One summer afternoon as a teenager, Ryks was invited to go flying with a neighbor, who was a DC-9 pilot for Republic Airlines. At the end of a path between two corn fields, they arrived at a narrow, short grass runway in time to see a yellow Stearman being pulled from a farm building.

“Donning the leather cap and goggles provided, I climbed in the front seat and we rolled down the runway and took off. He let me fly it around for a while and it was the most amazing and inspiring feeling—one that still sends chills up my spine when I think about it,” states Ryks.

So, why GFIA? Ryks comments, “The Gerald R. Ford International Airport is a first-class facility with dedicated employees who are passionate about their work. The airport has been maintained and improved in an excellent condition and there is strong community support for growing air service and business opportunities. In addition, the area is a wonderful family-oriented community. Not only are people friendly, welcoming and open, it’s a beautiful place to live. I am very thankful for the

opportunity to lead an excellent organization and enjoy a superb quality of life in such a great community.”

FAA Certification Inspection



In June, the airport underwent its annual FAR Part 139 Airport Certification Inspection. This extensive inspection, performed by the Federal Aviation Administration, is a requirement for all commercial airport operators, and focuses heavily on Airport Operations, Maintenance, and Fire Rescue.

The inspectors examine everything from airfield conditions to training, response times of the fire rescue team to maintenance standards. GFIA received “zero discrepancies” – that is, there were no issues that required corrective action.



Executive Director Brian Ryks, A.A.E.

“This area is a wonderful family-oriented community. It’s a beautiful place to live.”

~ Brian Ryks,
Executive Director

Speaking of family and community... Accompanying Brian to Grand Rapids is his wife of 24 years, Tracy – a marketing consultant – and their youngest son Jaxyn (“Jax”). Older son MacKenzie and daughter Meghan will both be enrolled full-time at the University of Minnesota this fall. MacKenzie is pursuing a major in finance and is currently employed at Republic Bank. Meghan is beginning her first year, is interested in Law and recently completed an internship at a law firm. Jax, who has enrolled as a freshman at the West Michigan Aviation Academy, has interests in music, golf, snowboarding, and fishing.

Aviation adventure is so inherent in their lives that Brian and Tracy spent their 20th wedding anniversary on the USS Harry S Truman off the coast of Florida, experiencing the thrill of landing and taking off on an aircraft carrier.

Building For The Future

The 2012/13 academic year will be just the third year of existence for the West Michigan Aviation Academy (WMAA), located on airport property at GFIA. With the addition of a junior class this fall, the Academy needed to expand – and expand it did!

For the first two years, student activities were accommodated by a remodeled 25,000 sq. ft. building located near the airport's parking garage. However, as grade levels are added and enrollment grows, additional space and infrastructure is needed to house what will soon be a fully-functional four-year high school.

Following a May 2012 ground-breaking ceremony, general contractor Pioneer Construction quickly ramped up construction activity as the site was prepped and footings and foundations were begun on a 42,500 sq. ft. expansion that will house five classrooms, two science labs, a gymnasium, commons, and offices. Thanks in part to favorable weather during the construction season, the September 1, 2012, completion date is well within reach, which is welcome news as WMAA anticipates growing from its current enrollment of 137 students to 230-240 this fall.



Maj. George Pavey, Dean of Aviation

As everyone knows, however, schools are about more than just “bricks and mortar,” and a new facility isn't the only development at the Academy. On the technology front, the school is preparing to provide each student with an iPad. Dick DeVos, president of the school board, said, “The one-to-one nature of this technology means that every student will have equal access to the same technology.” Dean of Curriculum and Planning Ruth Moxon adds, “Our emphasis is not the technology; our focus is still on teaching and learning. Our goal is to enhance student achievement and we want the best tools for that purpose.”

Along with the addition of faculty positions to accommodate student growth, WMAA has hired Major George Pavey as their Dean of Aviation. Major Pavey, an experienced Marine Corps Officer and naval aviator, is an instrument-rated commercial pilot, a certified single- and multi-engine flight instructor, and holds a Master of Education from Grand Valley State University.

So, as they prepare to take-off for the 2012/13 school year, WMAA students will see several big changes at the Academy as they return for a first-class educational experience. For more information about WMAA, visit their website at www.westmichiganaviation.org.

Airport Board Expands

The Gerald R. Ford International Airport Board welcomes its newest member, David A. Slikkers, to the Board. Slikkers is CEO of S2 Yachts, Inc., parent company of wind turbine blade manufacturer Energtx Composites and luxury boat-maker Tiara Yachts. He also serves as chairman of the Holland Area Chamber of Commerce.

In 2011, the Kent County Board of Commissioners voted to expand the GFIA Board by one seat, to be filled by a private sector business representative who lives within the airport's catchment area but not in Kent County. Following an in-depth search process, Slikkers was selected and formally approved by the Commission at its July 12 meeting.

Slikkers says that he hopes to bring a global business perspective to the airport board. “West Michigan has one of the fastest-growing job markets in the U.S., and that's not by accident. With two connecting flights, you can be on the other side of the world, and that's pretty significant for us as business leaders,” states Slikkers.

Policy and general oversight of GFIA are the responsibility of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Board, a seven-member body appointed by the Kent County Board of Commissioners. The airport board comprises three Kent County commissioners, three Kent County citizen members, and one citizen member from a county other than Kent in the West Michigan combined statistical area, each serving staggered three-year terms.



David A. Slikkers

Meet Our Intern

Kent County Department of Aeronautics began its internship program in 1990 and has welcomed students from across the country. Upon completion of the internship, these young men and women have gone on to work at airports and aviation industry partners throughout the U.S.

Rob Benstein, GFIA's Public Safety and Operations Director, oversees the 15-week internship program. "We use a broad-stroke-of-the-brush approach to the program, giving our intern as many diverse opportunities as possible to experience the full scope of airport operations. By the end of the program," explains Benstein, "the intern will have worked in each of the Department's divisions as well as having spent time with various tenants such as the Transportation Security Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, an airline, and a Fixed Based Operator."

Our 2012 Intern is Marise Oyouba, and here is what she has to say about the experience.

I graduated from St. Cloud State University, in central Minnesota, last December with a Bachelor of Science degree in Aviation Operations. I spent the following spring semester taking flying lessons to earn my private pilot license and started working toward an instrument rating. While applying for internships all over the country, I became particularly interested in a posting about Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GFIA) that I read on the American Association of Airport Executives' (AAAE) website. For me, Michigan was still close enough to the Midwest that I persuaded myself it wouldn't be a big adjustment, especially if it were only for a few months.

I am so glad that I decided to apply for the position! GFIA offers a great internship program, designed to give the intern experience in many areas of the airport and its operations and management. Being mid-way through this program, I must admit that I have learned so much more about the operation of an airport than I did during my college years. Time spent out on the airfield with the operations and facilities divisions (especially the engineers), attending meetings within the Department, and working with the airport communications center and the control tower, I feel like I am at the heart of the entire airport. Everyone I have encountered is willing to answer my questions and demonstrate what their duties are. The work environment at GFIA is so peaceful and team oriented; it shows in the work that is being done and the effort put forth by everyone to go above and beyond. I was so proud to be part of this

Department when, after the safety inspection by the FAA, the inspector provided positive feedback and thoughts on the operations at this airport and the emphasis on safety.

My expectations coming here have been greatly exceeded. While I thought I would get hands-on training in airport operations, I anticipated being viewed only like the newbie who has nothing to bring. Instead, I am treated as someone who has potential and am respected for my input. I am assigned projects and responsibilities and have the opportunity to make a contribution. My education and private pilot training provide great context for the procedures that I am learning.

I still have a lot to learn and to experience during this internship. I am grateful I came across such an amazing group. People in the Department of Aeronautics have a culture of working together and communicating among themselves and the tenants. I hope I can bring as much to this airport as it's giving to me, but all I can do is give my best and be willing to learn with a positive attitude, showing them how excited I am to join the airport management profession.



Presenting...

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

The GFIA Marketing and Communications division would welcome the opportunity to come to your next meeting and provide an overview of the airport, as well as updates on ongoing airport development projects and the state of the aviation industry. Presentations can be timed to fit nicely into a lunchtime meeting.

For more information, or to request a speaker for your next meeting, please contact the Marketing and Communications division at (616) 233-6053 or by email at bschedlbauer@grr.org. You may also visit the website at www.FlyFord.org for more information located under About Us, Newsroom.



News In Brief

- » Airport Building Maintenance Supervisor Fred Fischer is retiring. Fred has served the airport community for 25 years, the last 17 as a supervisor, overseeing a staff of nine who are responsible for maintaining the airport passenger terminal facility and infrastructure. We wish Fred the very best in his future endeavors!
- » The next three meetings of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Board will take place August 29, September 26, and October 31, 2012, at 8:30 am. All meetings are held in the International Room of the passenger terminal building unless otherwise noted on our website at www.FlyFord.org/AeroBoard.php. Meetings are open to the public.

arriving
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And, on the future of the aviation industry... Ryks states, "I think the greatest challenge is reliable funding of our aviation system, given the volatility of the economy and the airlines serving our airports. We've come to a new normal that requires us to think of innovative revenue generation and funding opportunities. We have to be entrepreneurial and think outside the box at every level. Aviation education is another area for the industry to focus on. We need to ensure we have younger generations interested in the many career fields aviation has to offer, in order to maintain a healthy industry over the coming years."

Well said, Brian. And, on behalf of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport and entire West Michigan community...
Welcome Aboard!

Employee Information Corner

GFIA's storm water, generated by rainfall and snow melt, is conveyed to local streams and rivers through the airport's storm sewer network. The airport and its tenants are required to safely manage petroleum products and other potential pollutants and to minimize any contact these substances may have with storm water runoff. Good housekeeping practices, including making sure the lids on dumpsters are closed when not in use, can help in minimizing or preventing storm water contact with polluting materials.

GFIA has a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan that describes the management practices used at the airport to minimize or prevent pollutants in storm water at the airport. The plan is available on the GFIA website at www.FlyFord.org or by contacting the airport at (616) 233-6000.

The active participation of GFIA staff and tenants is a critical part of the storm water management program. If you observe any practices or situations that appear to have the potential to negatively affect the quality of storm water at the airport, call Airport Communications at (616) 233-6055 and report your observation(s).

Aviation Fun Fact!

75 years ago, in 1932, Amelia Earhart was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean alone. She flew from Harbour Grace, Newfoundland to Londonderry, Ireland in 15 hours 18 minutes.

Today, that same flight could be made in a Boeing 747 in approximately 3 hours 50 minutes (although the grass airstrip would not be able to accommodate the jet aircraft).



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 contact the Kent County Department of Aeronautics:

Phone: 616.233.6000

Email: gfiainfo@grr.org

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