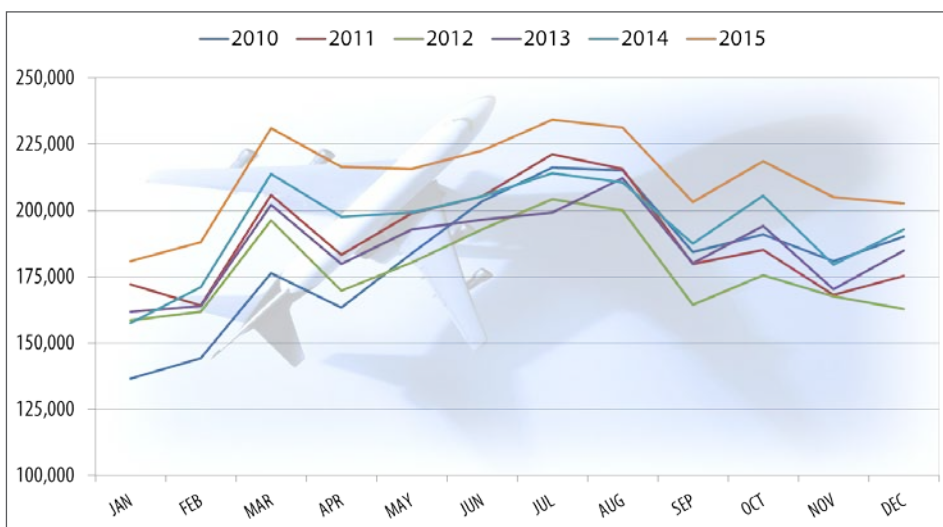


Passenger Record Soars to New Heights!

2015 was a banner year for passenger traffic at GFIA. Every single month we broke records, some of which had stood since 2010, by amounts ranging from 5.2% to 14.95%. July was our busiest month ever, serving more than 234 thousand passengers. We reached the two million passenger mark a month earlier than ever before, and ended the year serving **2,550,193** travelers!

"The past few years have been tremendous for the Gerald R. Ford International Airport, and we could not be more thrilled by the support received from our area business and leisure travelers who are choosing to fly to and from the Ford Airport," said GFIA Executive Director Brian Ryks. "The strong growth is also drawing the attention of our airline partners as we work with them to add seats and flights to both existing and new destinations."



Passengers numbers weren't the only factor that saw a year-over-year increase for 2015 either. Total cargo activity (enplaned and deplaned mail and freight) also increased over 2014. In total, the airport saw 82,594,563 pounds of cargo come through last year — that's more than 226K thousand pounds per day!

The airport's current-year monthly passenger statistics and previous years' annual passenger statistics can be found on our website at www.FlyFord.org/history.php.

Allegiant Launches Nonstop FLL Service

Allegiant's seasonal flights from Grand Rapids to Fort Lauderdale took off on December 16, marking the return of the highly anticipated service for West Michigan travelers. The seasonal flights will operate twice weekly from December 2015 through April 2016 out of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GRR).

"We're pleased to bring back seasonal service to Fort Lauderdale and re-open a popular destination for Michigan travelers," said Jude Bricker, Allegiant Travel Company senior vice president of planning. "We saw strong demand for Fort Lauderdale flights after our brief hiatus, and we're happy to make affordable vacations in Fort Lauderdale possible once again."

Allegiant Air, known for its exceptional travel deals, is now flying to six destinations out of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport.

"We are thrilled to welcome Allegiant's inaugural flights to and from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and what perfect timing as holiday travel and Michigan's migration south kicks into gear," said Gerald R. Ford International Airport Executive Director Brian Ryks. "With six nonstop destinations from the Gerald R. Ford International Airport, our partnership with Allegiant providing low-cost flights continues to grow."



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Sights and Sounds of the Season

From December 7 through 11, the airport's Grand Hall was transformed into a holiday venue for 12 area junior and senior high school vocal groups, including a new choir to the Festival. The Airport Holiday Music Festival is an annual tradition that has become a favorite of airport employees and patrons alike.

From a 6-voice ensemble to the 100-voice choirs, these student groups filled the air with a wide variety of musical stylings from Latin arias to classic carols to some new twists on old seasonal favorites. And, the holiday spirit really helped travelers get into the mood since Michigan weather made it feel more like spring than December! Many travelers stopped to take a photo or short video of the various performances. One gentleman said, "This type of event is such a great surprise for those of us traveling. To get off an airplane and be greeted by carolers really makes me feel at home."

The audience wasn't the only one having fun either. The students and directors love coming to the airport to perform. One director commented, "Every year when I put our performance schedule together I have a number of students who remind me that the airport 'has to be' on the calendar. They love coming out here to brighten people's day."

The Department of Aeronautics would like to thank the following schools for sharing their talented students with us this year:

- Alger Middle School
- City High School
- East Kentwood High School
- Grandville High School
- Jenison Elementary Schools
- Legacy Christian School
- Legacy Home School Alliance*
- Moline Christian School
- Northpointe Christian Middle and High Schools
- The Potter's House High School

** indicates a new choir for the 2015 Festival*

Friday, December 11, we had two very special guests with us in the Grand Hall as Mr. and Mrs. Claus stopped by to spread some holiday cheer and greet our travelers. Their visit was open to travelers, guests and the public. The airport asked guests to bring in two non-perishable food items per photo with Santa. Over sixty pounds of goods were collected and donated to Mel Trotter Ministries.



Before packing up the sleigh and heading back to the North Pole, Mr. and Mrs. Claus stopped to pose for a photo with the Potter's House High School Choir and director Ms. Sara Sisco. Honorary "reindeer" Pavlov, one of our therapy dogs, decided to join in the fun too!



East Kentwood High School Varsity Voices performs under the direction of Ms. Carrie Hoeksema.

Fire Captain Honored

GFIA Airport Fire Captain Thea Dornbush was recently honored by the Michigan Fire Service Instructors Association (MFSIA) as Western Region Instructor of the Year.

Thea is a 15-year veteran of the GFIA Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting division. She is an Airport Master Firefighter, licensed EMS Instructor/Coordinator, a Michigan Fire Fighters Training Council certified Instructor II and holds an associates degree in Fire Science from Kalamazoo Valley Community College.

The individual who nominated Thea stated, "Thea exemplifies what the Michigan Fire Service Instructor Association stands for!"

firefighter
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Airport Angels

Laura Genovich felt the giving spirit at the Gerald R. Ford International Airport during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend thanks to an “Airport Angel.” Genovich received a call the day before Thanksgiving telling her that her mom had a stroke at her home in Florida. She quickly found a ticket and booked a flight on American Airlines to Orlando. Unfortunately, the flight had a mechanical issue and had to return to the gate.



Laura Genovich and baby Audrey were very grateful to their Airport Angel and Southwest Airlines.

Running out of time as she sat on the plane trying to make other arrangements with tears running down her face, Genovich met Mary. Mary was sitting in front of her and said, “I’ve been listening to you for the last hour, and I’ve been praying for you and your family. I am not leaving your side until you are on a plane to Orlando,” Genovich recounted.

Genovich found a nonstop flight to Orlando on Southwest, but only had a few short minutes to get down the concourse and board. When they got to the gate counter, all passengers and crew were on the plane and Southwest Airlines agent, Gayle Mutchler, was the only person in the gate area.

Mutchler told Genovich the flight was getting ready to leave, but knew by the tears in her eyes that Genovich needed to make the flight. Mutchler quickly processed tickets for Genovich and her infant daughter. It was then that Mary, the Airport Angel, stepped in again. Mary paid for Genovich’s ticket,

hugged her and told her, “I love you, and the Lord loves you.” Mutchler, in turn, paid it forward to Mary by giving her a Southwest Airlines voucher for a future flight.

Genovich said both crews from Southwest Airlines and American Airlines were friendly & accommodating, even noting that a few of the luggage handlers were running from one plane to another to make sure her luggage, stroller and pack-and-play made the flight with her.

Genovich made it to Orlando safely and got to spend a few days with her mom before she passed away on December 3. When Genovich landed she also had an email from Gayle, her Southwest agent in Grand Rapids. It read: “I was the gate agent for Southwest Airlines in Grand Rapids working the flight to Orlando. I wanted to let you know that all of us here in Grand Rapids are sending you good thoughts and prayers. I hope everything gets better for you very soon, and we send our greatest condolences.”

“We (Southwest Airlines) help people and are here to provide the best service even in stressful times.”

*~Gayle Mutchler,
Southwest Airlines staff at GFIA*

Southwest’s GRR station also sent a rose bush to the family after hearing of Laura’s mother’s death.

Mutchler said she was “just doing her job” and noted that, “that’s the way Southwest is. We help people and are here to provide the best service even in stressful times.”

Genovich blogged about her exceptional customer service “Airport Angel” at GRR here: www.scarymommy.com/random-acts-of-kindness/. The blog went viral, being shared over 45,000 times, and was also featured on the Today Show and CNN.

Kudos to our GRR staff, and “Airport Angels” like Mary and Gayle, who made Laura’s experience, a little less stressful than it already was.

firefighter

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In addition to being a fire captain at GFIA and instructor for MFSIA, Thea also serves as a Lieutenant with the Spring Lake Fire Department.



Runway Project Earns Award of Excellence

Runway 8L/26R was completely reconstructed in 2015 including a new asphalt surface. Under prime contractor Kalin Construction, Michigan Paving and Materials placed 14,700 tons of asphalt on the runway which received an Award of Excellence from the Asphalt Paving Association of Michigan. The runway received the highest ranking of all asphalt projects evaluated by the organization throughout Michigan in 2015. The project engineering was Grand Rapids based Prein&Newhof.

“While we don’t complete our airport projects for the accolades, it is rewarding to be honored for a job well done,” states Brian Ryks, GFIA Executive Director.



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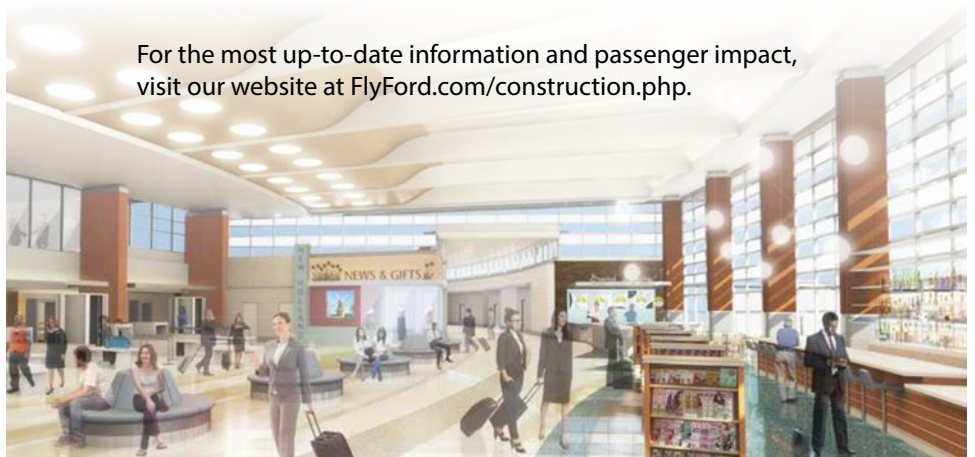
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News In Brief

- » GFIA Executive Director, Brian Ryks was named the 2015 Grand Rapids Business Journal's Newsmaker of the Year in Economic Development. Congratulations, Brian!
- » The next three meetings of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Board are currently scheduled to occur on February 24, March 30, and April 27. Current Board meetings begin at 8:30 a.m. with GFIA Authority Board meetings following immediately thereafter. Both are held in the International Room in the passenger terminal building. All meetings are open to the public.

Gateway Transformation

Gateway Transformation Project construction began in December 2015 and is slated to continue through summer 2017. The project's main feature is the consolidated passenger security checkpoint which will centralize and combine security screening to one main checkpoint in the Airport. Design also includes new restrooms, lights and terrazzo flooring, retail and food and beverage space.



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:

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Email: gfainfo@grr.org

Facebook: [GeraldRFordInternationalAirport](https://www.facebook.com/GeraldRFordInternationalAirport)

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