

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
November 13, 2017

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## Gerald R. Ford International Airport Preps for Thanksgiving with “Operation Handshake”



**Grand Rapids, MI** – A welcome home for West Michigan troops and other festivities are on tap for the Thanksgiving holiday, and one of the busiest days of the year at the Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GFIA).

On Wednesday, November 22nd, airport volunteers including therapy dog teams, and the Patriot Guard Riders will participate in “Operation Handshake,” an event to welcome home returning military members and veterans, and to thank them for their service.

Volunteers will staff both airport concourses from 9:00 a.m. – 7 p.m., and airport staff will be passing out treats and trinkets to thank passengers for utilizing the airport during the busy time of year.



“We appreciate our military year-round, but around the holidays we are extra thankful for their service knowing that many of them don’t get to make it home for a warm turkey dinner or spend time with their families,” said GFIA President & CEO Jim Gill.

“We appreciate the partnership with the Patriot Guard Riders of West Michigan, and their loyalty to serving our community through events like Operation Handshake. We hope we can give returning military a special welcome home to West Michigan.”

**The media is also encouraged to put a call out to the community, asking family members to notify the Patriot Guard Riders of returning military members’ arrival times and flight information.** Information can be sent to [michigan@patriotguard.org](mailto:michigan@patriotguard.org) or Tony VanGessel at 616-862-1984.

“This is what Thanksgiving is really all about,” said VanGessel, Captain of the Patriot Guard Riders of West Michigan. “What we see each year is an inspiration. We get a thank you from the military members, but it’s also heartwarming for the general traveling public around us to see what transpires.”

Because the Thanksgiving holiday is one of the busier times of the year, GFIA encourages passengers to **arrive at least 90-120 minutes before their flight**. TSA also encourages passengers to stay up-to-date on the latest travel notices and information about what you can or cannot bring on your flight by visiting: [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov).

Thanksgiving Holiday Travel interviews are available during the next week. If you would like to schedule something, please notify Tara Hernandez – [thernandez@grr.org](mailto:thernandez@grr.org).

**Friday - November 17 from 7a.m - Noon** - Tara Hernandez, GFIA Marketing & Communications Director & TSA Public Affairs Director Mike McCarthy are available to do in studio interviews or on site at the airport. Discussion points include security lines, new construction, examples and displays of things you can/can't bring on flights (think holidays: jams, jellies, certain liquids, etc.)

**Wednesday, November 22nd** - Early morning live shots available as well as early afternoon during “Operation Handshake.”

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