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## It's Official! Southwest Airlines 'Luvs' West Michigan!

Yes, it's true. After waiting and wondering for the past several months, West Michigan air travelers officially became part of the Southwest Airlines route network.

On May 2, 2011, Southwest Airlines completed their acquisition of AirTran Airways. Then came the tough decisions that route planners had to make...which airports would remain in the route network and which would not. GFIA was not included in the early eliminations, giving West Michigan travelers hope that Southwest would eventually operate at the airport.



The latest announcement came on January 20, 2012, when Southwest Airlines issued a press release which included GFIA in the list of the 22 AirTran airports that would continue to operate and eventually join the Southwest route map. Of the 69 cities AirTran served when Southwest acquired it, 53 cities are planned to convert to full Southwest Airlines service.

"We are committed to continuing to serve these communities - at first via AirTran, and eventually as Southwest. We know there are Southwest Customers who want access to these cities, but have never before had the opportunity, and the markets have long desired Southwest service," said Southwest Airlines Executive Vice President & Chief Commercial Officer and AirTran Airways President Bob Jordan. "We are excited about the cities we have chosen to keep in our combined network."

"At this point we don't know the specific routes they'll be flying," said Phil Johnson, acting executive director for GFIA. "What we know is that they are going to continue to fly where they do now. We hope to work with them in the future to expand the destinations they fly to from here."

Johnson also explains, "Airlines do not serve airports, they serve markets. Southwest has committed to serving the West Michigan market. Now, it's up to West Michigan travelers to support local air service, and the way to do that is to Fly Ford, the Gerald R. Ford International Airport."

Stay tuned to future editions of *Airport Connections* for updates. You may also keep up to date via the airport website at [FlyFord.org](http://FlyFord.org) or on Facebook at [Facebook.com/GeraldRFordInternationalAirport](http://Facebook.com/GeraldRFordInternationalAirport).

## GFIA Closes Out 2011 Flying High!

That's right! Gerald R. Ford International Airport set another passenger record in 2011. Thanks to our loyal customers – and our fantastic business partners – GFIA was privileged to be included in the travel plans of 2,275,332 passengers last year. This new record surpasses our previous record, set in 2010, by just over 4%.

Beginning in July 2009, the airport saw gains each month in the year-over-year passenger numbers, with September 2010 showing the largest gain at nearly 34.5% (as compared with September 2009). This trend continued for 38 consecutive months – during a recession and some tough economic times for the aviation industry and the nation.

Many factors may be credited with playing a role in these increases in passenger traffic including, but not limited to, completion of the airport's Terminal Area and Parking Improvement Program and the arrival of low-cost carriers Allegiant, AirTran and Frontier into the market.



**flying high**  
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## Yes, You Can Hear Us Now

In the summer of 2008, Gerald R. Ford International became the first U.S. airport to offer a hearing loop system that enables individuals with telecoil (T-coil)-equipped hearing devices to have public address system announcements transmitted directly to their hearing aids. The system was installed on both airport concourses.

Now, airport patrons with a hearing loss can hear these gate, flight, and baggage announcements in the airport Grand Hall as well. In January, the airport contracted with Hearing Loop Systems of Holland, MI, to install the system throughout the Grand Hall prior to the installation of new floor coverings.

“The Grand Hall installation presented additional challenges for us in light of the thirty-foot ceilings,” states facilities director Tom Ecklund. “On the concourses, the wires were run through the ceiling, which is much lower. The height of the Grand Hall ceiling was not conducive to



**hearing loop**  
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**flying high**  
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“We are, of course, very pleased that 2011 was yet another record-setting year for us,” comments acting executive director Phil Johnson. “We knew that the timing of several of these growth factors would bode well for us and we continue to remain quite positive about the future of GFIA.”

In other airport business, the airport also saw an increase in cargo activity, as 80,706,216 pounds of air cargo traveled in and out of West Michigan via GFIA. That averages out to just over 221,000 pounds – or 110 ton – per day! While the bulk of that cargo is handled by FedEx Express at the Air Cargo and Trade Center, several of the passenger airlines also handle air freight and mail.

Additionally, there were 567,442 vehicles parked in the airport’s parking facilities throughout the year in 2011.

Indeed, many factors contributed to another banner year, but the most important one is you – the passenger. We thank you for making us a part of your travel plans throughout 2011 and look forward to serving your travel needs in 2012.

## Airport Board Prepares For Another Year

At its January 25 meeting, the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Board prepared for the year ahead as the members re-elected citizen member Joe Tomaselli as chairman and County Commissioner Dick Vander Molen as vice chairman. The Kent County Board of Commissioners, at its January 5, 2012 meeting, reappointed citizen member Floyd Wilson Jr. to a second term and Commissioner Ted Vonk to a third term on the Airport Board. Rounding out the Board for 2012 are Commissioner Roger Morgan, and Kent County citizen member Terri Lynn Land.

At GFIA, policy and general oversight 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. The non-Kent County citizen position is new for 2012 and the Board of Commissioners is in the process of selecting this individual from a pool of applicants.

A top priority for the Board in 2012 will be the selection of a new executive director. For more information on the search process, see the associated article at right.



**Citizen member Joe Tomaselli was re-elected as Chairman for 2012.**



**Kent County Commissioner Dick Vander Molen was re-elected as Vice Chairman for 2012.**

## The Search Is On

The Gerald R. Ford International Airport Board has started the search for a new executive director. The Board has retained the services of ADK Executive Search, a firm that specializes exclusively in the airport management community, to conduct a nationwide search.

The net will be cast to allow for both internal and external applicants to be considered concurrently. After ADK vets the candidates, the top group will be reviewed and considered by the search committee comprising Board chairman Joe Tomaselli, Board members Dick Vander Molen and Floyd Wilson, Jr., County administrator Daryl Delabbio, Birgit Klohs of The Right Place, and Doug Small of Experience Grand Rapids.

The entire process is expected to take four to six months to complete. “We expect to have a high level of interested candidates as Grand Rapids continues to be an attractive community to relocate given its strong reputation for commerce and quality of life,” states Tomaselli. During the interim, Phillip Johnson, A.A.E., has been appointed acting executive director.

Check out future editions of *Airport Connections* for updates.

## Sounds Of The Season

While the lack of seasonal snowfall may have kept travelers out of the holiday spirit, the 17th annual Airport Holiday Music Festival made every effort to change that. During the first week of December, the passenger terminal building's Grand Hall was transformed by the sounds of holiday songs performed by thirteen area middle and high school choral groups. Each choir, ranging in size from 16-75 students, adds its own unique style to classical Latin arias, classic carols and seasonal favorites.

Airport patrons and employees alike enjoy the music festival as much as the students who come to perform. One patron stated, "I have traveled in and out of the airport this same week for the past six years; and I always enjoy arriving just a bit earlier to listen to the kids as they perform."

The 2011 festival included three new groups – Grandville Middle School's 6th Grade Choir, The Barry County Christian School Performing Arts Vocal Group, and the Plymouth Christian High School Senior Choir. The Department of Aeronautics would like to thank the following schools for sharing their talented groups with us:



Grandville Middle School 6th Grade Choir performs at the airport's 17th annual Holiday Music Festival

## Airfield Maintenance Supervisor Makes Final Departure

For the first time in 27 years, the GFIA airfield maintenance division is plowing snow without long-time supervisor Eric VanderStel. But this crew has little to worry about. The airfield maintenance division has been frequently recognized at the national level for their winter operations prowess, including being a recent winner of the prestigious Balchen-Post Award for snow removal operations. To say that they've "got the right stuff" would be an understatement.



In addition to heading up the snow removal activities at GFIA, VanderStel coordinated other activities including, but not limited to, mowing and vegetation maintenance, vehicle and equipment maintenance, airfield pavement painting, joint/crack sealing, and maintaining the perimeter fence that surrounds the airport property. To accomplish all of these tasks, the airfield maintenance staff comprises a supervisor, an assistant supervisor, 15 permanent employees and 5 seasonal workers.

Although winter is the most demanding season for the staff, at the time of this writing, Grand Rapids is 21.5" below average for seasonal snowfall. But does that mean that the staff can relax? "Not really," says acting supervisor Jeff McNally. "There are a lot of lower priority tasks that get pushed to the back burner during snow season. This year's slow start to the snowfall just means that we will get those tasks completed sooner, because the reality is, the snow will come...it's just a matter of when." And we know that when the snowfall begins, GFIA's award-winning snow removal crews will be on top of things.

In the meantime, the Kent County Department of Aeronautics wishes Eric well in his retirement and thanks him for his many years of dedicated service.

- ♪ Barry County Christian School
- ♪ East Kentwood High School
- ♪ Grand Rapids Public High Schools
- ♪ Grandville Middle School
- ♪ Legacy Christian Middle School
- ♪ Moline Christian Middle School
- ♪ Northpointe Christian Middle School
- ♪ Northpointe Christian High School
- ♪ Plymouth Christian High School
- ♪ Potters House Middle School
- ♪ Walker Charter Academy
- ♪ Wyoming Park High School

### hearing loop

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the hearing loop technology. The only way to install the system in the Grand Hall was to have the wires installed in the floor."

So, in between the removal of old flooring from the Grand Hall and the installation of the new, the crew from Hearing Loop Systems came in once again. The process involved cutting a shallow channel in the concrete floor in which the induction hearing loop cable was laid. The channel was then covered prior to the flooring material being installed. Once all the work was completed, the system was brought on-line and tested.

We hope that this expanded amenity makes the experience of air travel easier and more enjoyable for our patrons with hearing loss.

## News In Brief

- » The Department of Aeronautics' Comprehensive Annual Financial Report has once again been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting. This Certificate is the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government unit and its management. This is the 18th consecutive year that the Department has received this honor.
- » The next three meetings of the Airport Board will take place on February 29, March 28, and April 25, 2012 at 8:30 am. All meetings are held in the International Room of the passenger terminal building. Meetings are open to the public.
- » GFIA will be partnering with Michigan Community Blood Centers to host a community blood drive on Friday, May 18, in the International Room in the passenger terminal building. You may pre-register for a time on our website at [www.FlyFord.org/BloodDrive.php](http://www.FlyFord.org/BloodDrive.php) or by contacting Donna Thomas, office administrator, at (616) 233-6046. Walk-ins are also welcome.

*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](mailto:gfiainfo@grr.org)

**Airport Board** | Joe Tomaselli, chair; Dick Vander Molen, vice chair; Terri Lynn Land; Roger Morgan; Ted Vonk; Floyd Wilson, Jr.

*\* County Commissioner*

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## Airport Employee Information Corner

Safe wintertime air travel operations depend upon aircraft and airfield pavement deicing activities, which are strictly regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). GFIA and its tenants control and manage spent deicing materials through the use of best management practices (BMPs). BMPs include structural elements such as physical barriers and collection vehicles, as well as non-structural elements such as training and education programs. Specific stormwater BMPs used at GFIA include structural BMPs (i.e. mobile collection units, catchbasin inserts) and non-structural BMPs (i.e. conservation measures, monitoring of material use, material handling).

GFIA's current stormwater discharge permit requires the use of these BMPs and allows for the discharge of stormwater into a local tributary that enters the Thornapple River. The permit also required GFIA to develop a conceptual plan to remove the discharge from the tributary. The conceptual plan was presented to the DEQ in August, 2011, and called for the stormwater discharge to bypass the tributary and enter the Thornapple River through a different route. The DEQ has approved the plan in concept, but much work remains to be done, including the following:

- » Continued sampling and testing of the discharge to determine possible effluent limits for the proposed discharge;
- » Determining the final route to the Thornapple River for the new outfall;
- » Designing the new conveyance system, which is expected to include open channel and natural treatment systems to improve the quality of the discharge as it enters the Thornapple;
- » Working with a Stakeholders Advisory Committee (local community, environmental, airline, and business representatives) as the final plan is developed and designed.

The DEQ will provide opportunities for public comment before the proposed program can be approved. These opportunities will be publicly advertised, and will be announced on GFIA's web site.

The design of the program is expected to start in 2012, with construction to start in the fall of 2013. GFIA is required to complete construction no later than October 1, 2015.

Tenants are reminded that nitrogen-based deicing products (e.g. urea) are not allowed for use anywhere at the airport. Any tenant requiring information on approved deicing products should contact Roy Hawkins, planning engineer, at (616) 233-6021 or via email at [RHawkins@grr.org](mailto:RHawkins@grr.org).

## Kent County Department of Aeronautics

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