

GFIA Named Top Airport in North America

The Gerald R. Ford International Airport provides first-class travel experiences and excellent customer service and amenities, and those efforts have been recognized by Airports Council International (ACI) as the best in North America.

ACI has announced the Gerald R. Ford International Airport has achieved the first place ranking in the “Best Airports by Size and Region – North America (2-5 million passengers per year) category, and tied for second place ranking in the “Best Airport by Region – North America (all airports over two million passengers per year) category as a part of ACI’s 2015 Airport Service Quality (ASQ) Awards.

“Customer service is a top priority for our entire team at the Gerald R. Ford International Airport and we are thrilled to be recognized as the top performer of our size in North America,” said GFIA Executive Director Brian Ryks. “We’re dedicated to ensuring continued progress in this area as we make significant investments in personnel, services, and facilities focused on providing a first-class experience from the vehicle curb to the aircraft gate. We are working to improve the passenger experience every day, and this award reflects that effort.”

GFIA has continued to improve the customer experience from adding concession updates, complimentary and faster WiFi, airport ambassadors, a therapy dog program, updated parking and valet services, new skyCAP services, and more. The airport has recently commenced its \$45 million Gateway Transformation Project to consolidate security screening, update restrooms, new flooring, lighting, business centers, retail and food and beverage space.

“We are thankful for all of the tenants and stakeholders who are the front-line service providers behind this award,” said Ryks. “From the airlines to our parking services, law enforcement, and curb front security, to TSA and airport ambassadors - they do a tremendous job day-in and day-out to ensure the passengers have a quality experience at our airport.”



Southwest Airlines Now Offering Nonstop Service to the Windy City

Southwest now offers nonstop service to six cities from GFIA, adding Midway to a list of flights that includes Baltimore/Washington, Orlando, Denver; and seasonal service to Tampa & Fort Myers. The new flights from Grand Rapids to Midway began on April 12 and operate three times daily.



“We are thrilled to see Southwest’s growth in our market with the addition of Chicago Midway service,” said GFIA Executive Director Brian Ryks. “This new nonstop service will be a benefit to our business passengers looking to get in and out of the city easily in one day, but it also gives our leisure passengers a chance to find affordable fares for a weekend shopping, taking in a baseball game, or connecting through Midway to one of its 73 cities. Southwest brings our community the very best in air service and we are happy to expand our partnership to promote the LUV throughout West Michigan.”



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Airport Director Departing

The Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GFIA) Board has announced that Executive Director Brian Ryks has been hired as CEO & Executive Director at the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport.

Ryks, who has led the executive staff at GFIA since July 2012, was selected as the finalist for the Twin Cities position by the executive committee of the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) in Minneapolis in early March. The full commission voted, and unanimously endorsed the recommendation on March 21.

“While we are saddened to lose such a tremendous leader who has done nothing short of exceptional work in his time at the Ford Airport, we are excited for Brian both personally and professionally as this is a huge step up in his career, and a chance to go home to family,” said GFIA Board Chairman Roger Morgan. “Brian spearheaded several large projects, and put us on the map of air service development and customer service. He has led the airport during a period of record growth – including a nine percent surge in passenger counts in 2015, the arrival of Southwest to the market in 2013, and extensive facility improvements over the past couple of years; all of which paved the way to launch our Gateway Transformation Project in December.”

Morgan said that the board will move quickly to find a replacement. “The search process will include the board, as well as representatives from our business community,” said Morgan. The Airport has largely completed its transition from a department of Kent County government to regional airport authority governance. Final approval on that transition is expected from the Federal Aviation Administration on July 1, 2016.



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A Parting Message to Our Employees and the Airport Board

When I landed at GRR in July of 2012, I saw an airport that was in excellent condition as a result of a staff that took pride in ensuring their airport was a first-class facility dedicated to meeting the growing needs of today’s traveler. I also saw opportunity. Opportunity to engage with employees, develop relationships and together, create a plan to make our organization and the airport the best it could be. Shortly after settling into my new role, I enjoyed taking the time to consult with many employees, airport board members, and community stakeholders to listen to concerns, obtain feedback and identify our priorities moving forward. Airport Board Members invested the time to hold a strategic planning retreat, and together we developed priorities to focus our efforts in the coming years.



It was an agenda that included a number of items:

- Instituting a culture of customer service and hospitality that brought together all airport stakeholders under that goal to eventually achieve a #1 Airport Service Quality ranking.
- Rebranding the airport to establish an iconic image to match our vibrant community.
- Engaging the business community to inform them of the dynamics of the Ford Airport operation and request their help in moving our agenda forward.
- Creating innovative funding strategies to enhance our

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Team Pride Comes Together

Take a tour through many fire stations and you will likely find a station table; a table that is personalized to represent the firehouse and firefighters who work there; a place to gather as a team for work, meals, or recreation. Recently, two GFIA firefighters decided to spearhead the construction of one for their firehouse. Firefighters Gutierrez and Smith talked about the ownership and pride that would result from the process, as well as the end result. After five months, FF Smith went to a lumber yard and picked up some old oak wood on his off day. The next day he brought the wood to the station and a plan began to come together.

They set up a work area in the truck bay. Each shift, after the “workday” was complete at the station and down time began, they would break out the tools and work to make their vision become a reality. The majority of the tools and equipment used were from FF Smith’s home shop. Slowly and painstakingly, the oak planks were transformed

into the beautiful tabletop. FF Gutierrez designed the decal layout for the top of the table while the legs and base were created and the table assembled. Overall the station table, measuring roughly four feet wide and nine feet long, took two and a half months to build. The money spent on the project was donated by FF Gutierrez.

An addition to the station table was then proposed by firefighter Bryan Wolcott. He had a fire hose donated, and it was used to create an American flag. FF Smith and FF Wolcott designed and framed the flag.



Firefighter Kirk Smith begins the transformation from old oak planks to custom tabletop.



Firefighters Bryan Wolcott, Kirk Smith, Dan Haight, Captain Thea Dornbush, and Firefighter Tony Gutierrez proudly display their new creations.



Firefighters Gutierrez and Smith affix the decals to the tabletop.

GFIA Presented With Environmental Achievement Award

Airports Council International – North America (ACI-NA) announced the winners of the 2016 ACI-NA Environmental Achievement Awards. The Environmental Achievement Awards are presented to airports that strive to protect and preserve the environment through their programs, initiatives, and projects. This year’s recipients include Tampa International Airport, Gerald R. Ford International Airport, Vancouver Airport Authority, and Nashville International Airport.

Gerald R. Ford International airport won the Mitigation award for its sustainable stormwater/deicing runoff control project. The airport’s project involved an extensive planning and design process with significant and sustained engagement from both airport and community stakeholders to come up with solutions to address glycol-impacted stormwater runoff from the airport.

“Each year, our member airports continue to impress in their ability to innovate and implement better and more sustainable strategies to protect and preserve the environment,” said ACI-NA President and CEO Kevin M. Burke. “The recipients of the 2016 ACI-NA Environmental Achievement Awards are true leaders in the field of environmental management, and I congratulate them on their success.”



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Ryks’ last day on the job will be May 20, 2016.

“This is a bittersweet move for me,” said Ryks, a Lakeville, MN native. “I am thrilled to return home and to the airport where I started my aviation journey, but I am heavyhearted to leave the Gerald R. Ford International Airport team that has built such tremendous growth over the last several years. We would not have accomplished the things we did in air service, construction projects, and customer service without the efforts of our entire GFIA team, tenants, and staff, and I take great pride in knowing that they will continue those efforts under a new leader.”

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News In Brief

- » Hot Off the Press! The 2016 Report to the Community, our annual publication, is now available. You can view the report online at FlyFord.org/publications.php, or request a hard copy via the phone number or email listed below.
- » The next three meetings of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Board are currently scheduled to occur on May 25, June 29, and July 27. Board meetings begin at 8:30 a.m. with GFIA Authority Board meetings following immediately thereafter. ***Due to current construction, some of these meetings may be held in the Ford Room on the mezzanine level.*** All meetings are open to the public.

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- terminal and concourse gateways, allowing us to meet the demands of increased passengers, and truly reflect West Michigan throughout our facilities.
- Transitioning the governance from a County Department to a fully autonomous airport authority representing the regional service area and positioning the airport for future growth.
 - Doing all we can to support the next generation of aviation professionals at the West Michigan Aviation Academy.

Because of the total commitment of airport staff, a Board devoted to the mission and many community champions, our agenda moved forward at a rapid pace. I depart knowing the initiatives still in the works will succeed. While I am saddened to leave a wonderful community ripe with airport champions as well as a staff and Board that are truly amazing, I feel incredibly blessed to have had the opportunity to work with such outstanding individuals. You are the reason the Gerald R. Ford International Airport will continue to ascend to new heights.

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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