

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Gerald R. Ford International Airport Preps for Thanksgiving with “Operation Handshake”



Above: A soldier returns to GRR during the 2018 Thanksgiving Holiday travel rush and is greeted by Operation Handshake volunteers and participants.

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

On Wednesday, November 27th, airport volunteers including therapy dog teams, and the Patriot Guard Riders and Blue Star Mothers 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 concourse exits from 9:00 a.m. – 7 p.m.

“We know that not every military member can make it home during the holidays because they are making other sacrifices for our nation. For those returning to West Michigan we want to make it extra special and let them know we are thankful for their service,” said GFIA President & CEO Tory Richardson. “The Patriot Guard Riders of West Michigan and the Blue Star Mothers do a tremendous job taking time out of their holiday week to welcome home our military, and we appreciate their loyalty to our community through events like Operation Handshake.”

The event is free and open to the public. **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 Tony VanGessel at 616-862-1984 or tvange58@yahoo.com.

“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 happens with just a simple salute, handshake, or a thank you.”

The Airport is currently under construction on Phase II of its Gateway Transformation Project, and along with the busy holiday traffic, lines could be longer than normal. **The Airport encourages passengers to arrive at least two hours before their flight.**

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is expecting a record-breaking number of flyers this upcoming Thanksgiving holiday travel period with more than 26.8 million passengers traveling through security screening checkpoints around the U.S. from November 22 through December 2nd – an increase of four-percent from 2018.

Additionally, Ford Airport passenger numbers are up as October 2019 was the busiest October in GFIA history, and the airport has already served more than three million passengers this year. GFIA has seen passenger traffic increase for 25 consecutive months.

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. Additionally, travelers should keep these top three tips in mind:

1. **Pack smart.** Prepare for security when packing and ensure that there are no prohibited items in baggage. As always, passengers can bring pies, cakes and other baked goods through the checkpoints; however, liquids such as eggnog and maple syrup, and gels such as preserves and jellies, should go into checked bags. Liquids in carry-on must follow the [3-1-1 liquids rule](#). Download the [MyTSA app](#) or use the [“What can I bring?”](#)



tool on [tsa.gov](https://www.tsa.gov). This allows you to type in an item to find out if you can bring it in your carry-on bag, checked bag, either or neither.

2. **Renew your TSA PreCheck membership.** Individuals who obtained TSA PreCheck five years ago are now able to [renew their TSA PreCheck membership online](#). Individuals who do not have TSA PreCheck should [enroll now](#) to get TSA PreCheck benefits, available at more than 200 U.S. airports, in time for their holiday travel. Travelers enrolled in a trusted traveler program, like TSA PreCheck, do not need to remove shoes, laptops, liquids, belts and light jackets. To find the trusted traveler program that best suits your travel needs, use the [DHS trusted traveler comparison tool](#).
3. **Ask for passenger support.** Travelers or families of passengers with disabilities and/or medical conditions may call the [TSA Cares](#) helpline toll free at 855-787-2227 at least 72 hours prior to flying with any questions about screening policies, procedures and to find out what to expect at the security checkpoint. TSA Cares also arranges assistance at the checkpoint.

For more information on the Patriot Guard Riders, visit <http://www.patriotguardmi.org>

Media interviews are available from now through November 26. For interview requests or more information, please contact Tara Hernandez.

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About GFIA

The Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GFIA) is the second busiest airport in Michigan. The Airport served over 3.26 million passengers in 2018 and over 9,000 travelers pass through GFIA each day. The Gerald R. Ford International Airport offers nonstop service to 32 major market destinations with more than 140 daily nonstop flights. The Gerald R. Ford International Airport is managed and operated by the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Authority. GFIA generates over \$3.1 billion in annual economic output throughout West Michigan and employs over 2,000 people. For more information on GFIA visit: www.flyford.org or follow the airport on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter: @FlyGRFord