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Gerald R. Ford International Airport

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Airport Goes to the Dogs: GFIA Announces Therapy Dog Program

Grand Rapids, Mich. – Sometimes traveling can be “ruff” and the Gerald R. Ford International Airport is hoping to ease emotions associated with travel by launching a therapy dog program. The program, known as GFIA: Gentle Fur in Action began on Thursday, October 3rd.

The airport is working with West Michigan Therapy Dogs, Inc. The volunteer program will place therapy dogs and their owner/trainer in airport areas such as the grand hall waiting area, baggage claim, concourses and gates where passengers are arriving and departing. Unlike service dogs, therapy dogs are meant to be approached, and offer passengers the chance to rub a belly or shake a paw. The dogs are intended to take the stress and anxiety out of travel.

“We want all of our passengers to have a positive experience when flying,” said Gerald R. Ford International Airport Executive Director Brian Ryks. “Having therapy dogs in terminal areas will help ease our passenger’s tensions, stress and create a warm and welcoming travel experience in our airport with these newest ambassadors.”

The therapy dogs will begin roaming at the airport once a week and are clearly labeled with a vest that says, “Pet Me.” The dogs have worked in other environments such as hospitals and nursing homes and lend comfort, support and put a smile on people’s faces.

“I was at the airport last week and my dog Gunner approached a woman,” said West Michigan Therapy Dogs, Inc. Director of Programs Amy Meinecke. “Gunner went up and nudged her hand. She saw him and immediately started sobbing and wrapped her arms around him. She had a family member in the military that was leaving and my dog offered some support.”

“We are so excited to have this program at the airport, and stories like that are why we do our job.”

For interview or video opportunities, please contact Tara Hernandez.

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