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Contact: Tara Hernandez, Marketing & Communications Director  
(616) 233-6053 or [thernandez@grr.org](mailto:thernandez@grr.org)

## Airport Celebrates Viewing Park Re-Opening with Ribbon Cutting Celebration



(Above): L-R GFIA Board Chairman Roger Morgan, Cascade Community Foundation Sheila VanZile, Donor David Bottrall, and GFIA President & CEO Jim Gill celebrate the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Viewing Park ribbon cutting.

**Grand Rapids, Mich.** – It’s a favorite spot for aviation enthusiasts, families, and photographers, and now the Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GFIA) Viewing Park has more room, amenities, and conveniences for those that visit the park.

GFIA, in partnership with the Cascade Community Foundation (CCF), celebrated the grand re-opening of its Airport Viewing Park Project, with a ribbon cutting and press conference. The \$1.12 million renovation includes a new pavilion, permanent restrooms, new seating areas, expanded parking spaces, and more.

“The re-opening of our Airport Viewing Park is our commitment to the community to preserve the memories that so many people in West Michigan have made, and to embark on new memories for generations to come,” said GFIA President & CEO Jim Gill. “We are thankful for the partnership with the Cascade Community Foundation, and we appreciate the vision and hard work that went into these renovations.”

The Airport contributed \$675,000 to the project, with the balance funded through CCF's "Community is Our Middle Name" Capital Campaign.

"Pat Combs and I have been delighted and grateful for the community support that was essential to the success of the Cascade Community Foundations 'Community is our Middle Name' campaign," said campaign co-chair Sheila VanZile. "The project couldn't have happened without the significant support of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport and their amazing team."

The Airport Viewing Park opened at its current location at 4820 Kraft Avenue SE, just north of 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, in 1995. Over the years it has become a popular spot for area workers to take a lunch break, or for families to pack a picnic and enjoy a free afternoon spotting planes. *Grand Rapids Kids Magazine* voted the park the "Best Kept Secret in Grand Rapids" (July 2015). As its popularity has grown, so has the need for an updated facility.

"This viewing park has changed our lives," said Rockford resident Jennifer Zirkle. Jennifer spoke at today's ribbon cutting along with her son, James, who has autism. Prior to visiting the park a few years ago, James never spoke more than a few words. "Today he speaks in full sentences," said Zirkle. "Bringing him out here two or three times a week and hearing him talk about the big blue Southwest planes or the big red and white Delta planes was just amazing. My family cannot thank you enough for investing in this."



Above: Jennifer Zirkle and her son James talk about what the park means to them.



With the new improvements, parking spaces nearly doubled from 56 current spaces to 104 in the renovated lot. Additionally, there are four bus parking spaces to accommodate school and tour groups. Guests will have more than double the seating of the old park with new picnic tables and benches being added – including six of these tables in the pavilion area. Permanent restrooms, a filtered drinking fountain, new signage, and more trash receptacles were also a part of the improvements.

"The CCF wanted to demonstrate that our reach and contributions go beyond the Cascade Township boundaries, and this project does that in a significant way," said CCF Board Chair Laura McDowell.

Mathison & Mathison Architects designed the new Viewing Park, and contractor Owen Ames Kimball was the construction team.

For interviews, 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 2.6 million passengers in 2016 and over 7,000 travelers pass through GFIA each day. The Gerald R. Ford International Airport offers nonstop service to 24 major market destinations with more than 120 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 1,500 people. For more information on GFIA visit: [www.flyford.org](http://www.flyford.org) or follow the airport on Twitter: @FlyGRFord