



AirportConnections

www.flygrandrapids.org

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Gift to Airport May Be a Lifesaver

Traveling at GFIA just got even safer. Thanks to a generous donation from John Endres, director of sales for West Michigan Health and Safety, the Airport now has an additional Automatic External Defibrillator (AED). The Airport's Aircraft Rescue Firefighting department already carries an AED in its rescue vehicle, but the additional AED will be housed in the Airport Police office in the terminal building.

The AED will improve the Airport's ability to respond to victims within the crucial first two minutes of sudden cardiac arrest. Statistics show that over 90% of victims survive when treated during this window of time. When treatment is delayed by 10 minutes, the survival rate drops to less than five percent.

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According to Sergeant Paul Beauchamp of the Airport Police, each of the Airport's 20 law enforcement officers will soon be fully trained on use of the unit.

Says Endres, "So many other airports have AEDs housed in their terminal building, and I thought we should have one, too. Grand Rapids has been good to me, and I wanted to find something to give back to the community." ➔

Foundation Gets Just What It Wishes For

Thanks to West Michigan, more than a dozen area children can look forward to their wishes coming true.

On Saturday, March 27, the Make-A-Wish Foundation®

tion. "That's absolutely phenomenal. We could not have asked for better weather or a more successful event."

The festivities began with a live auction and a perform-



of Michigan held its annual When Wishes Take Flight Gala, presented by Standard Federal Bank, at Northern Air/Northern Jet Management's east facility at GFIA. The event attracted over 320 people and raised enough money to grant at least 15 wishes to West Michigan children with a life-threatening medical condition.

"We raised \$115,000," said Sarah L. Spencer, community events manager for the founda-

ance by 13-year-old Alannah of Holland, who received a standing ovation after singing to guests as part of her Make-A-Wish experience. The acclaimed Three Men and a Tenor capped off the evening's entertainment, accompanied by Alannah on their closing number.

"Alannah's performance served as a wonderful reminder as to why fundraisers like this are so important," said Susan Lerch, president and



CEO of the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Michigan. "It was evident that she was living the start of her dream and having a ball. That sense of joy was contagious to all those present that night."

Adds Spencer, "This was a great experience, and we could not have done it without the overwhelming support of everyone at the Airport and the wonderful folks at Northern Air. Thank you for partnering with us and for supporting our mission." ➔



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Airport Profile Nets Adrian Award



It's official: GFIA's 2003 Airport Profile is a winner.

The Profile earned a Silver Merit Award in the annual Adrian Hospitality and Travel Industry Awards. Expanding upon aeronautic principles, the publication explains how the Airport provides "lift" to the entire community.

Sponsored by Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association

International, the Adrian Awards have recognized the best of travel-related marketing and communications programs and publications for the past 14 years.

The 2003 Adrian Awards drew more than 1,500 entries from 40 countries. GFIA is honored to have its Airport Profile recognized at this level. ➔

GFIA's 2004 Annual Profile is now available. To obtain a copy, contact the Kent County Department of Aeronautics at 616-233-6000 or info@grr.org.

Passenger Appreciation Days a Repeat Success

Spring break at GFIA no longer means just busy terminal buildings and full parking lots. This year's spring break season kicked off April 1 with Passenger Appreciation Days, transforming the Grand Hall into a tropical oasis of food and fun for Airport patrons.

"After the success of last year's Passenger Appreciation Days and all the positive feedback we received from our customers, we didn't hesitate to repeat this event," said Jim Koslosky, Airport director. "Besides, we're always looking for ways to say thank you to the community, and this is just one more way to express our gratitude."

More than 20 Department of Aeronautics employees volunteered to staff the booth for three days, chatting with passengers and handing out complimentary snacks and beverages, as well as beach balls, coloring books and other free giveaways. There were also contests and other activities, including a paper-airplane flying contest and a prize drawing for free airline vouchers.

A special thanks to the thousands of Airport patrons who stopped by the Passenger Appreciation Days booth, as well as our event partners Northwest Airlines, Comair/Delta Connection, U.S. Customs, and food and beverage provider HMSHost. ➔



Florida: It's Not Just for Spring Break Anymore



On the heels of a very successful spring break season, Northwest Airlines has extended its nonstop service to Tampa and Orlando for the entire year.

According to Northwest Airlines Station Manager Dan Conner, "The service is going very well. The flights are run-ning full, and we're confident that it's going to remain strong."

By serving Tampa and Orlando, Northwest takes you to all the attractions of central Florida, including famous-name

resorts and other, less well-known gems. No matter what time of year you go, you'll find plenty to see and do in both of these exciting cities.

The daily flight to Tampa departs at 8:05 a.m. and returns to GFIA at 2:10 p.m. The Orlando flight departs at 3:50 p.m. and returns to GFIA at 10:05 p.m.

IN ORLANDO:

- Walt Disney World Resort
- Universal Studios Florida

- SeaWorld Adventure Park
- Fantasy of Flight — featuring vintage aircraft exhibits, daily demos, flight simulators, tours, and balloon and airplane rides
- Gatorland — home to thousands of alligators and crocodiles, complete with a petting zoo and daily gator wrestling
- The NBA's Orlando Magic
- Holy Land Experience — a recreation of old Jerusalem with costumed characters and dramatic presentations
- Busch Gardens
- The Florida Aquarium — with sharks, coral reefs, sea horses, touch tanks and more
- The Museum of Science and Industry — featuring a hurricane simulator
- Kid City, The Children's Museum of Tampa — where children can visit and interact with fire stations, banks, grocery stores and more
- The NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers, NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning, MLB's Tampa Bay Devil Rays and spring training camps for several major league baseball teams
- Gulf Coast beaches perfect for sunning, swimming or shell collecting. ➔

IN TAMPA:

- The Ybor City Museum State Park — offering a glimpse of Tampa's historic cigar-making industry

Virgil Westdale, Hometown Hero: A GFIA Employee Profile

When people talk about a long, full life, this is what they mean. At age 86, Virgil Westdale has been a pilot, a war hero, a distinguished engineer and a successful inventor. But he wasn't content to stop there. Today, Westdale is also the oldest Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employee nationwide, and GFIA is pleased to call him our own.

The son of a Japanese immigrant, Westdale was born as Virgil Nishimura on January 9, 1918. (The family translated its last name to Westdale in 1942.) His family moved to Michigan when he was nine

and rowed \$40 from a friend so he could earn his pilot's license, too. "Then war broke out in December," recalls Westdale. "I joined the Air Corps in 1942 and had to leave school."

"They put me through aerobatic training," says Westdale. "Spins, turns, slow rolls, snap rolls...I was good at it! Then one day I went to the airport to fly and found the FAA inspector had been ordered to take away my license. I had a suspicion that it was because I was half-Japanese. But I was just an American farmer."

Soon after, Westdale received his notice from the War Department. "I was ordered to report for duty at Ft.

rated unit in the U.S. Army. His battalion's duty was to provide protective fire for infantry patrols working through French and Italian mountain passes into German territory.

"Then in 1944, another battalion went out too far on an observation run, and 275 men got cut off by the enemy," says Westdale. Running low on food, water and ammunition, and with no way out, they became known as The Lost Battalion of the 36th Division. "The general was told if anyone could break through, it was the 442nd," says Westdale. "By the end of the mission, we saved 211 of the Lost Battalion."

the principal scientist and developed his first patent – to be followed by 24 more chemical, chemical engineering and mechanical engineering patents during his career. "Sometimes I worked on things until late at night," he says. "I wouldn't let an idea go."

Then came retirement in 1986. "I found I couldn't sit at home and watch TV while the neighbors worked. I had to be part of something, doing something that's needed," says Westdale. So in 1995, he began his career as a security screener at GFIA. According to Lori Moon, TSA screening manager, "Virgil is a wonderful employee. His performance is exceptional,



Virgil in 1943 (left), in 1983 (center), and today (right).

and his mother died when he was 12, leaving his father to care for all five children. "Those were hard times, but I lived through it," says Westdale. "I've always had a good attitude. Maybe that's why I'm still alive!"

Following a brief career hauling marl, Westdale headed to Western Michigan University. Not content just to earn his degree, Westdale bor-

Custer," he says, "and even though I was a trained pilot, 10 days later, I was cleaning stove hoods. Those are the things I had to go through, but I guess it makes you tougher."

Next, Westdale was asked to report to the 442nd Japanese-American Regiment. Within months, they were shipped out to the war in Europe, not knowing they would become the most deco-

Westdale's regiment was also present at the liberation of Dachau. "One of our guys shot the lock off to liberate the prisoners," he says. "They thought we were going to kill them until we said, 'No, we're Americans!'"

After the war, Westdale headed back to college to earn his degree. He found a job at Burroughs Corporation, then moved to AM International in Chicago, where he became

and all of his coworkers look up to him."

Westdale concludes, "I've been through a lot and never let my pride get in my way. This job allows me to work indoors, it's clean and I get to meet lots of people. What more could you want?"

Indeed, looking back at Virgil Westdale's life, what more could anyone want? ➔



NEWS IN BRIEF

- The Kent County Aeronautics Board's next three meetings are scheduled for May 26, June 30 and July 28 at 8:30 a.m. Meetings are held in the International Room on the first floor of the terminal building. The meetings, open to anyone who wishes to attend, generally run between 60 and 90 minutes.

- The Department of Aeronautics welcomes Andrea Speers as community relations coordinator. Andrea will also serve as associate editor of *Airport Connections*.

- Michigan Community Blood Centers – Grand Valley will conduct a blood drive at GFIA on Friday, May 21, from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in the International Room on the first floor of the terminal building. To sign up for a time to donate, call Donna Thomas at the Department of Aeronautics at (616) 233-6000. ➔

Gotcha! Airport Security Program Pays Off



person who confronted him. But as soon as law enforcement is summoned, whoever 'catches' Sneaky Sam gets a \$20 cash reward on the spot."

All \$20 winners also earn a chance to win the annual grand prize drawing. The winner of this year's \$500 gift certificate from travel agency Navigant International was Gary Christian of ATA Connection airline. Says Christian, "I caught Sneaky Sam on one of the aircraft ramps. I asked to see his ID and all he had was a junior police badge. When I escorted him off the ramp, he said, 'You got me!' and handed me \$20." Christian used his \$500 gift certificate to pay for his family's hotel fare during spring break. He adds, "This is a great program. I'm glad the Airport does it because it keeps people alert."

Sneaky Sam visits GFIA 50 times a year. According to Stricklen, "Before the program started in 1995, we had a 63% challenge rate. After three months, we were at 100% and every year since then, it has been between 96% and 100%."

Stricklen concludes, "You don't know how good your security actually is until you test it with something like Sneaky Sam. We get more value — dollar-for-dollar — out of this program than anything else, because it opens everyone's eyes and ears." ➔

How do you encourage Airport workers to keep their eyes open for security every second? It's easy — with Sneaky Sam.

Dave Stricklen, chief of Airport police, says, "I first heard about the Sneaky Sam program at a seminar and liked the fact that it was a positive reinforcement."

Here's how the program works: "We take someone who most employees don't know very well and send him or her out into the restricted areas without a badge to act as Sneaky Sam," says Stricklen. According to Airport policy, employees must ask anyone without a visible badge for proper ID. If a badge is not produced, the employee is supposed to escort the person out of the restricted area or call Airport law enforcement.

Stricklen continues, "When Sneaky Sam is challenged, he will still try to deceive the

Pulling for Special Olympics

Okay West Michigan, it's time to show your stuff. If you and 19 of your friends have what it takes to pull a 727, here's your chance to prove it.

On August 14, GFIA will host the area's second Plane Pull® Challenge of Michigan. Each team will pay an entrance fee, with proceeds to benefit the Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics Michigan. Teams will compete to see who can pull a 155,000-lb. FedEx Boeing 727 a distance of 12 feet in the shortest time.

Last year's winner was Tri-County Fire

& Rescue, who moved the plane in just 6.05 seconds. But perhaps the real winner was Special Olympics Michigan, which raised an impressive \$18,000 from the event.

Sharice Clifton, special events manager for Special Olympics Michigan, says, "Last year was a great first year. We foresee this as being a wonderful opportunity for the community and Special Olympics."

Register early by June 30 to take advantage of a reduced entry fee. Standard registration deadline is July 30. For the latest details about the event, or to register your team, visit www.somi.org/planepull. ➔



Airport Connections, the newsletter of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GFIA), is published quarterly by the Kent County Department of Aeronautics. We encourage GFIA tenants and all of our readers to contact us with your comments, suggestions and submissions. Also, if you are not already receiving *Airport Connections* by mail and wish to be added to the mailing list, please call the Kent County Department of Aeronautics at (616) 233-6000. For additional information, be sure to visit us on the web at www.flygrandrapids.org.

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