

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



Grand Rapids, MI – A ribbon cutting to celebrate the opening of the fourth level parking garage roof, a welcome home for West Michigan troops, and other festivities are on tap for the Thanksgiving holiday and one of the busiest days of the year at the Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GFIA).

The fourth level of the parking deck will officially open on **Wednesday, November 25th with a brief ribbon cutting in the parking garage, following the airport board meeting at approximately 9:30-10 a.m.**

Construction on the parking deck roof began in mid-March. The addition of the roof will open up 1,138 additional covered parking spaces. The garage will now accommodate 4,172 total covered parking spaces year-round.

“We all know how wonderful it is to have close, covered parking during Michigan winters,” said GFIA Executive Director Brian Ryks. “We are excited to have this project complete before the busy Thanksgiving holiday, and we are happy to provide easy, convenient access for our growing passenger traffic.”

The project was completed on schedule and on budget at a total of \$17.3 million.



Additionally on Wednesday, airport volunteers including therapy dog teams, and the Patriot Guard Riders 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 concourses from 9:00 a.m. – 7 p.m., and snacks will be served.

“We know that not every member of our military can make it home during the holidays, but for those returning to West Michigan we want to make it special and let them know we are thankful for their service,” said GFIA Executive Director Brian Ryks.

“We appreciate the partnership with the Patriot Guard Riders of West Michigan, and their loyalty to serving 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 michigan@patriotguard.org or Tony VanGessel at 616-862-1984.

“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 transpires.”

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

For interview requests or more information on the day of the event, please contact Tara Hernandez.

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