

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



Grand Rapids, MI – 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).

On Wednesday, November 23rd, 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 airport staff will be passing out treats and trinkets to thank passengers for utilizing the airport during the busy time of year.



“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 Acting President & CEO Phil Johnson.

“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.”

The Airport is currently under construction on 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 90-120 minutes before their flight.** 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.

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

Media interviews on site at the airport, as well as studio visits are available from now through November 23. For interview requests or more information, please contact Tara Hernandez.

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