

2 views of Metro's eye-appealing new terminal

New 'earrings' can't hide flaws Facility still a work in progress

BY PAUL BEAUDRY
STAFF WRITER
pbeaudry@oehomecomm.net

There was a stretch in time, during the early 1970s, when the Chicago White Sox tore up the infield grass at old Comiskey Park and put in AstroTurf.

One player described it as putting "earrings on a pig." When asked why earrings on a pig, the story goes, the player said "no matter how you dress it up, it's still a pig."

The analogy can also apply to the new Midfield Terminal — except the structure is the pair of earrings. It's a beautiful facility — reminding me of the best parts of Denver International, Atlanta's Hartsfield and Chicago's O'Hare — in terms of design, new features, being user-friendly and all the other things you expect from a billion-dollar-plus facility.

Any problems remaining aren't with the facility, but can be pinned squarely on Northwest Airlines' curly red tail.

Parking Garage

A major improvement. Forget about the 11,000 parking spots the county brags about. Two new innovations deserve a big bonus.

One is a huge sign as you turn into the garage letting you know approximately how many spots are available on each level in each type of parking. If you turn into the economy parking entrance, a sign will inform you on how many parking spots are available on each of the 11 levels.

It's not infallible. I turned into a level that was listed as full and found a spot with no problem. But it gives you an idea where to head.

The other is the moving walkway that parallels the front of the terminal. Even if you park at the far end of a level, you only have to walk to the front of the building to pick up a walkway.

Checking in

It's a wonderful, airy, brilliant entrance to an airport — aesthetically. Functionally, it can be the mother of all bottlenecks.

A first-class passenger gets a first-class trip through the system.

Their lines for ticketing and security are minimal — and even better if there's no luggage to be checked.

For the majority of the poor fools who don't check baggage at the curb (line was even longer) or use the much-ballyhooed parking garage check-in (unattended), it was welcome to the cattle car (moo). With a 40-minute wait at 7:30 a.m. on a Saturday, Northwest was the worst at its best.

The airline trumpets its multitude of E-ticketing stations, but if you have to check luggage, you must use an attended E-ticket center. The lines for the e-ticket service centers were longer than the regular ticket line in the Davey Terminal (they're even longer now). If NWA increases the number of flights to take advantage of the new terminal — which they haven't yet — it will get worse.

Signs to steer my fellow cattle would have helped, but were nonexistent. Employees offering to help would have helped — but were rarer than an in-flight meal.

The best example was at the security checkpoint. At the north end of the terminal, the line snaked its way through the terminal. The end of the line was about 50 feet away from a second checkpoint with virtually no line. But the cattle had no idea there was a second checkpoint because A) there were no signs and B) no one told the passengers.

Checking out

Getting your luggage is very different and yet very similar. The goal of the new terminal is to have the luggage at the carousel within 15 minutes after the plane lands. And there have been horror stories of the baggage system not working, losing luggage and/or taking up to two hours for the bags to arrive intact.

On a Tuesday late morning, the bags took nine minutes to arrive from the time the cabin doors opened to the time they popped onto the carousel. Nine minutes. Two thumbs up.

However, the county and NWA dropped the ball completely on securing the area. As in the Davey

Terminal, the McNamara Terminal offers no kind of system to make sure the right person has the right bag. Anyone can come in walk off with baggage and no one would be the wiser.

Impossible? Not at Atlanta's Hartsfield Airport, where a guard matches the bag and claim check.

Fountain and other notes

FastPay is the greatest thing since television remote controls. You walk up to the machine, insert your parking ticket, zip in your debit or credit card and it spits out another ticket stub and noted lane and you're out of the structure. Use it.

Please see EARRINGS, A10



STAFF PHOTO BY PAUL BEAUDRY

Aerodesign: The new terminal has an aeronautical design, moving walkways for quick movement and big screen TVs to watch the news.

We deliberately waited a week before venturing into the new Edward H. McNamara Terminal/Northwest Gateway at Wayne County Detroit Metropolitan Airport. You can't judge a new building in its first days of operation.

We flew at different times on different days. One of us flew out on a Saturday morning and returned on a weekday midday. The other went out on a Sunday morning and back on a Saturday afternoon. One parked his car, the other was dropped off and picked up. One came in off Eureka Road, the other off Merriman. Both checked luggage. Both used E-ticket. Here's what it was like at the new terminal.

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER
hgallagher@oehomecomm.net

Remember the opening of "The Graduate." Benjamin is flying home from college. His fingers are glued to the airplane seat arms, his knuckles white, his face frozen and the soundtrack plays ... "Hello, darkness, my old friend." Yeah, it was like that flying into Detroit Metro Airport on the afternoon of March 9.

We had left warm, sunny Fort Myers, Fla., where the early afternoon temperature was already in the low 80s and found ourselves flying into a whipping, wracking, stomach churning windstorm. And it all began so well. My wife and I left early Sunday

morning March 9. We had our son drop us off at the new Edward H. McNamara Terminal/Northwest WorldGateway. We came from the west on I-94, then south on I-275 to Eureka. The signage on the freeway was poor and if I hadn't been following the new terminal story for a while, I might have missed that this was the way to the airport. Once on Eureka, the road narrows which raises questions about what it's like on a busy business Monday. On Sunday it was fine and the signage here into the airport was much better.

We zipped right in to the departures level. We pulled up to the curb and checked our luggage with the skycaps ... quick, easy, no hassle. Right inside the door we found an e-ticket kiosk. An attendant talked us through the procedure, which was helpful though the computer prompts are easy to understand.

We took the escalator down to the gates. There was no line at security and we passed through quickly with more time than we had expected to check out the new terminal.

The soaring, aerodesign has a definite wow factor. The floors were clean, the large space was well lit. Though many stores were closed, the essentials were in — coffee bars, newsstands, a couple tavern restaurants.

Breakfast anyone?

But this was early morning and we were looking for a good place for breakfast. We searched and searched and finally the On-Line Cafe opened. The waitress forgot part of my order, forgot our toast and then brought untoasted bread. The food was tourist class airline quality. And my wife couldn't get a cup of real tea. Nor could she get a cup of regular black tea at Starbucks. And when she finally paid for a cup at McDonald's, they told her — uh, oh — they'd run out of teabags. (Cracker Barrel, there's real opportunity here to open a good breakfast restaurant.)

Speaking of food, it's not cheap. At first, officials promised "street pricing," meaning the cost of a Big

Mac was to cost the same at the terminal as it did at the one on Wayne Road and I-94.

Then they changed it to close to street pricing — higher, but not as high. Try really higher. For example, a large Whopper value meal at the airport runs \$6.69. At the Burger King at Plymouth and Wayne roads, it's \$4.45 — a mark up of 57 percent.

We rode the tram, lots of fun but unless you have to go the whole length of the terminal, not that practical. Better are the moving sidewalks that efficiently move people and their carry-ons at a quick pace.

The fountain, the light tunnel and the huge windows to watch the jets are all entertaining.

Rough ride

We left a chilly Detroit for a warm south Florida and thought, all in all, that the new terminal was attractive, efficient, well run.

Then we returned. By the time we arrived in Detroit, the winds were ripping through at 60 knots. The pilot said he'd hover for a while and might have to take us someplace else.

Then an hour after scheduled arrival the decision was made, we were cleared to land. I've never been on a roller coaster that wild. When the plane landed the passengers on the full 757 gave the Northwest pilot a well-earned ovation. When the plane pulled in, we were delayed again because they couldn't connect the bridge from the terminal to the plane.

We expected that the luggage might take a little longer than usual, but almost two hours seemed excessive. First, the winds prevented the crew from unloading the luggage. Then the carousel had mechanical problems. They were planning on moving our luggage to another carousel and then changed their minds.

When we inquired about the problems with an "information" person, we were told they didn't handle that kind of information. As for security, there was no one around to see if we had picked up

Please see PROGRESS, A10

YOUR HOME PROVIDES SHELTER, COMFORT, AND A WAY TO CONSOLIDATE YOUR DEBTS.

Our home equity line of credit rates haven't been this low in decades. So now's the time to use the equity in your home to consolidate your credit card bills, school loans, auto loans and more. Discover the relief of one lower-interest payment to replace all those higher-interest payments. Just call us at 1 800 800 LOAN, log on at www.bankone.com/800800LOAN, or visit your nearby Bank One.

4.50% APR **1.800.800.LOAN FOR**

BANK ONE

*Subject to credit approval. Advertised rate subject to certain conditions and restrictions including qualifying loans having an 85% or less loan-to-value ratio and on credit lines of \$50,000 to \$250,000. The rate you receive is subject to Bank One credit and other policy requirements and considerations and may be different from the advertised rate. Rates are subject to change at any time without notice and may be higher or lower than the rate currently offered. The APR on variable rate lines may increase or decrease, not to exceed 25%. This offer is available only on new home equity lines. Properly and flood insurance may be required. Borrower is responsible for a \$50 annual fee, 10% to 15% insurance (when required), mortgage taxes (if any), recording fees, and other release fees in some states. Other fees may apply. Other rates are available on credit lines of \$5,000 to \$49,999 and for loan-to-value ratio above 85% up to 100%. Contact us for more information regarding rates, fees, terms, conditions, and restrictions. ©2002 Bank One Corporation

YOU HAVE ARRIVED.

VISIT THE SPRING BUNNY

MARCH 16TH TO 30TH
LISTEN TO MUSIC WEDNESDAY THROUGH SUNDAY AT 1PM

MONDAY - SATURDAY 11 AM-7PM
SUNDAY 12PM-6PM • NORTH GRAND COURT

You wander into the center of a Town Square. The garden is full of flowers, the lawn is immaculate and the white picket fence is a perfect touch. It is Spring and you are here to see the bunny stomp because you wish to see the look of joy on your child's face.

SOMERSET COLLECTION

NEWMAN MARCUS, 5455 FIFTH AVENUE, NORTH BEND, MARSHALL ISLANDS
AND MORE THAN 180 OTHER UNIQUE SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS.
FOR MORE INFO LOG ON TO WWW.THESOMERSETCOLLECTION.COM