

■ before you take off



Recombobulation Area

By Rebecca Renner

General Mitchell International Airport (MKE) boasts a one-of-a-kind destination in what MKE officials claim is the only airport recombobulation area. Though “recombobulation” wasn’t technically a word when it first graced MKE’s walls in 2008, it has been added to several dictionaries since then, including the Wiktionary and yourdictionary.com. While the jury at Merriam-Webster is still out on the word, the internet seems to agree that it means the opposite of discombobulation. The entry in the Wiktionary defines recombobulation as “the act of recombobulating; putting back into order; removing confusion.”

Before recombobulation rose to recognition, it started as the brainchild of Barry Bateman, MKE’s former airport director. According to Harold Mester, MKE’s marketing and public relations manager, Bateman invented the word for the first “Recombobulation Area” sign, which he ordered to be hung after the security checkpoint in MKE’s Concourse C. “He thought people would get a chuckle out of it,” says Mester.

What started as an effort to lighten the mood for weary travelers who are regrouping after passing through the security checkpoint has spawned a bit of an internet fandom. MKE’s Recombobulation Area has a Facebook fan page. It’s the subject of thousands of tweets and gleeful Instagram posts. It’s been the topic of discussion on Reddit. Too Much Rock for One Hand, a street store in Milwaukee, even sells a t-shirt emblazoned with what has become sort of an offbeat slogan for the city.

Despite the Recombobulation Area’s numerous fans, MKE has decided not to capitalize on its fame. “We wanted to keep it a grassroots idea,” says Mester. “People have circulated it on social media a lot, but airport leadership has decided to keep it a fun thing for guests.” ■

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By Claire Col

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