

Judge 'Ned' Fenlon Honored for Mackinac Bridge Efforts

Local Legislator Key Supporter of Project

Judge Edward "Ned" Fenlon already has a number of achievements of which to be proud. He was the instrumental player in the construction of three bridges, established Michigan State Police posts throughout the state, served in the state legislature, and improved relationships with Native American tribes. Monday, August 15, he received a plaque in honor of just one of those accomplishments.

In 1933, Judge Fenlon introduced legislation to begin the construction of the Mackinac Bridge. He also helped to obtain funding for the engineering of the structure, and the Mackinac Bridge Authority, during a meeting on Mackinac Island August 11 and 12, recognized his contributions to the bridge. He couldn't

attend the meeting, having just returned from California, but came to the Mackinac Bridge headquarters in St. Ignace Monday, August 15, to accept the resolution.

Larry Rubin was the first executive secretary of the Mackinac Bridge Authority, and said that although he has been working on the bridge since 1957, and has worked with Judge Fenlon, it was not until recently that he recognized all that the former state legislator had done to further the cause of the bridge.

"I was executive secretary for 35 years and I never knew all the things he did, and I never took too much interest because I was wrapped up in other things," said Mr. Rubin. "I always regretted that I didn't weave him into the

Bridge Authority. We just never gave Ned Fenlon the credit he was due."

In addition to being a key factor for the bridge, those who knew him also presented accolades toward his character and personality, calling him kind, modest, and dedicated.

"He is one of the kindest, softest spoken, most pleasant men I have ever encountered," Mr. Rubin said. "He is eminently fair, and I consider him one of the true gentlemen of our time."

Mr. Fenlon, who is 101 years old, served for six years as one of the youngest Michigan Legislature representatives, representing a district that included Emmet and Mackinac counties. He served for 24 years as the 33rd Judicial Circuit Judge for Mackinac, Cheboygan, Emmet, and Charlevoix counties. He now

resides in Petoskey, though he still makes occasional forays to his hometown of St. Ignace, often entertaining residents of the Mackinac Straits Hospital Long Term Care Facility on his banjo.

The Mackinac Bridge Authority resolution reads:

Whereas, Ned Fenlon, during his term as State Representative for the Mackinac-Emmet district of the State of Michigan, did work to initiate enabling legislation that led to the creation of a Mackinac Bridge Authority, and

Whereas, The success of that legislation served to significantly bring attention to the possibility that a bridge could span the Straits of Mackinac, and

Whereas, Mr. Fenlon persevered through that time when few believed that the bridge could be built and many members of the

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Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



Big Battle Over Mighty Mac

Blanket Indictment of Mascots Is Folly

It is good there's growing sensitivity across the nation to avoiding Indian nicknames and mascots and images disparaging of, and offensive to, the nation's first people.

But blanket indicting of use of Native American names by sports teams is folly, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association's banning of post-season play because of use of the Chippewa name by Central Michigan University (CMU) is political correctness run amuck.

Upon further review, that bad call should be reversed. CMU is second to none among Michigan institutions preserving and honoring the proud heritage of American Indians. It has a rich relationship with the Mt. Pleasant-based Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, which calls the NCAA action "not acceptable" and on Friday joined CMU President Michael Rao in appealing CMU's inclusion in the NCAA ruling.

The association--headquartered, ironically, in Indianapolis, Indiana--listed CMU among 18 schools with nicknames, etc. deemed "hostile or abusive."

Rich Morrison, CMU's veep for public relations and marketing, rightly calls the edict hostile and abusive to CMU.

"Chippewa" is not negative stereotyping by CMU any more than it is in Chippewa County. Five other Michigan counties are named to honor tribes (Huron, Menominee, Ogemaw, Otsego, Ottawa). Five honor Indian chiefs (Mecosta, Missaukee, Newaygo, Osceola, Sanilac).

According to the Michigan Manual, 19 counties have names derived from Indian languages--several of them related to rivers, including Manistee and Muskegon. Alpena is "a good partridge country;" Kalkaska is said to mean "burned over;" Leelanau "Land of Delight."

In April, CMU told the NCAA that it had "adopted the 'Chippewa' nickname in 1942 to reflect the rich Indian heritage of the mid-Michigan region;" continues to use the name "with respect and dignity;" and does not permit use of mascots "or other form of Native American symbols or images."

So what's NCAA's hangup? Rao probably nailed it when, after CMU was included early this month in the Egregious Eighteen, he suggested maybe the NCAA had not read CMU's April submission.

The "Saginaw Chips" tribe, as it is often called around the Isabella Reservation it occupies under the Treaties of 1855 and 1864, in 1988 adopted a resolution applauding the Michigan Department of Civil Rights for efforts "to end the use of Indian nicknames, mascots and logos by Michigan junior highs, high schools, colleges and universities (which) represent stereotypical and derogatory portrayals of Native Americans."

At the same time, the tribe said it had no objection to CMU's use of "Chippewa" that "is often used in a proud and honorable sense." In 2002, the tribe and university signed a formal commitment to "honor, dignity and respect."

CMU's Clarke Historical Library has Michigan's most complete Indian collection,

including microfilmed federal records, writings of missionaries, printings in Ojibway (Chippewa), and volumes on treaty rights and children's literature written by or about Native Americans. (Disclosure: I'm an ex-member of Clarke's board of governors.)

As a mascot at football games of the Florida State University Seminoles, a white guy war-painted as Chief Osceola romps across the field on a spotted horse. No matter, according to the *Washington Post*, that the Seminoles never used war paint--the outgoing local chairman of the Seminole nation, according to the *Palm Beach Post*, said it is "proud of its representation on campus."

The NCAA reversed its ban on FSU and certainly should on CMU, which is a far straighter arrow on Indian heritage.

Big Battle over Mighty Mac

The Mackinac Bridge Authority is stunned, and Senator Jason Allen, R-Traverse City, says he may introduce legislation to reverse the decision of Director Gloria Jeff of the Michigan Department of Transportation to move some of the authority's powers to MDOT and the Department of Management and Budget.

Explaining Jeff's decision to move some functions such as bridge inspections and investing bridge revenues, MDOT spokesman Ben Kehrman, according to Gongwer News Service, said it was part of an effort to "make the business practices of the authority as transparent and accountable as possible."

Allen said: "The Granholm administration continues to demonstrate a disregard for the citizens of northern Michigan. Usurping the Mackinac Bridge Authority is just one more blow to northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula, adding to the list of proposals to eliminate our vote and send our money downstate."

When I asked what he meant by that, Allen cited as an example administration decisions on funding in Cheboygan and other northern projects.

Bridge Authority Chairman Bill Gnodtke of Charlevoix objected to Jeff "dragging our employees through the mud." Republican Gnodtke noted comments in *The St. Ignace News* by ex-authority member Thomas Guastello, a former state legislator from Macomb County, that Jeff's "taking over the board's power completely eliminates the past practices of every other highway commission since the bridge was built, and it eliminates the positive contribution and independent views the Bridge Authority brings."

When I asked Friday -- in view of comments to me by Allen and Gnodtke -- which side Gov. Jennifer Granholm takes on the bridge dispute, her office stuck by the same weasel-word statement that press secretary Liz Boyd gave Tuesday to *The St. Ignace News*:

"The Mackinac Bridge is a Michigan treasure and, at the end of the day, we know everyone wants to do what's best for the bridge and the state of Michigan."

George Weeks is the political columnist for The Detroit News and is syndicated by Superior Features.

Letters to the Editor

MDOT To Work With MBA

To the Editor:

This letter is written to clarify the actions taken by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to restore accountability to the Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA). An August 25 *St. Ignace News* article describing the most recent meeting of MBA did not include the facts and business justifications that have precipitated the actions taken by MDOT in recent years, including the following:

1. The MBA board voted to hire a private investment firm to manage the \$25 million of funds that will be used for a future reconstruction of the bridge's road surface. The board had been advised by the Attorney General's Office that only the State Treasurer had legal authority to manage the bridge's investments. The Authority's contract with this private company would pay this firm about \$62,500 per year. MDOT and the State Treasurer determined that the State Treasurer -- which invests more than \$50 billion for all state agencies -- could provide the same services for only \$15,000 per year, a considerable savings over the board's private firm. Ten months after this change was made, several MBA board members have publicly stated that they are pleased with the State Treasurer's management of bridge investments.

2. The MBA board recently ordered Mackinac Bridge to hire a risk management firm to perform a \$24,000 study to identify business risks at the bridge and determine insurance needs. The vendor selected by the board was suggested by one of the insurance brokers currently selling \$250,000 of insurance coverage to the MBA. The board made no effort to determine if the price quoted for the study was reasonable, and there was no effort to competitively bid out this study. Subsequently, MDOT retained the Michigan Department of Management and Budget (DMB) at a cost of \$2,000 to complete a thorough study of the risks the bridge faces and the insurance coverage the bridge should have, saving the Mackinac Bridge \$22,000 of taxpayer funds.

3. The MBA board has been spending about \$250,000 annually for insurance at the bridge. The results of the DMB review described above concluded that the bridge was paying for \$4,500 of redundant and unnecessary insurance, paying \$10,000 too much for auto insurance protection, and paying \$130,000 for insurance coverage that should be self-insured

to achieve additional savings (like all other State of Michigan agencies do). Rather than waste toll revenue on unnecessary insurance costs, MDOT implemented its cost savings plan to responsibly reduce the bridge's insurance costs and to keep tolls low.

4. The MBA board entered into an annual bridge inspection contract with a private engineering firm. The MBA had not been following standard state contract procedures and has been overpaying this firm by \$15,000 per year. MDOT is in the process of recovering these overpayments and has instituted new procedures at the bridge to prevent future overpayments.

Some additional elements of the August 25 article require clarification as well. First, the article stated that the Mackinac Bridge is completely self-sufficient and does not receive any state funds. In fact, the bridge has received substantial state support over the years, including more than \$62 million currently in loan repayment assistance that the state provided. Without this state assistance, bridge tolls would be substantially higher today than the low tolls which users of the bridge enjoy.

The article also referenced access to bridge inspection reports. Mackinac Bridge inspection reports show the bridge is well maintained and is in excellent condition, especially for a 50-year-old structure. Following the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, major bridges in the U.S. have elected to keep their inspection reports confidential, because they contain useful information for terrorists. Generally speaking, the detailed findings of the report are no longer discussed in public. General observations and conclusions about bridge conditions are still discussed in public settings. This practice has been followed at the Mackinac Bridge to protect the bridge from acts of terrorism, consistent with how other similar bridges operate.

The MDOT has taken a more active role in overseeing the operations and finances of the Mackinac Bridge and that role will result in the anticipated saving of almost \$4 million in taxpayer funds over the next 15 years. Additionally, business practices have become more efficient, transparent, and consistent, and security measures have been updated to meet the realities of the potential threats that confront major transportation assets nationwide.

The Mackinac Bridge is Michigan's premier transportation asset. MDOT remains committed to working with the MBA and the Michigan Legislature to ensure the Bridge retains its pre-eminent status and that the MBA continues to be accountable to Michigan taxpayers.

Leon E. Hank, CPA
MDOT Chief Administrative Officer

Let Them Know How You Feel

To the Editor:

I want to commend Commissioner Joe Durm and his fellow commissioners on the job they are doing in running the county. I have been to a few of the many meetings Commissioner Durm referred to in his letter to the editor of August 24 regarding medical insurance, and it is a challenge to continue to provide the same benefits to employees as insurance costs continue to rise. It would seem to me that the commissioners are fulfilling their oath of office, in which they pledged to "faithfully perform the duties of the office of County Commissioner, according to the best of my ability."

Unfortunately, he apparently missed the point of my letter to the editor on August 17. According to the Mackinac County expenditures for 2004, commissioners salaries totaled \$21,102. Additionally, they received payments for "regular" meetings totaling \$6,480, and payments for "special" meetings totaling \$17,520. The County's share of payroll taxes on the above listed commissioners' wages totaled \$4,084. In addition, in 2004, \$10,388 was paid into a retirement program for the commissioners. That totals \$59,574 in compensation paid to or for the benefit of commissioners in 2004 (not including health insurance premiums in 2004).

On top of that, listed in the 2005 budget, they anticipate \$40,494 in health insurance costs to be paid for the benefit of three commissioners. That totals over \$100,000 in anticipated expenditures to compensate five commissioners, which of course averages out to over \$20,000 per commissioner in 2005.

I have received many positive comments regarding my letter of August 17, to which I replied every time, "Thank you, but if you don't let your commissioner, a commissioner, or the whole commission know how you feel, nothing will change." I again say, thank you in advance, but I ask you that if you feel that this represents perhaps more expense than a county the size and wealth of Mackinac can afford, please make that call.

Robert Winkelman
St. Ignace

Camp Interaction Was Inspirational

To the Editor:

I had the pleasure of volunteering at Camp Quality (a camp for children with life threatening diseases) last week. Lani Johnson Fettig, Mandi Johnson, and Randi Johnson were also volunteers, and have been for several years. I just want St. Ignace to know that they have three wonderful representatives of our community. Their interaction with the kids at this camp was inspirational. I have never seen three girls who gave so much of themselves as these young women. They were upbeat, cheerful, and excellent role models for all of us every day at camp.

I am looking forward to helping next year.

Beverly Schmidt
St. Ignace

Body Recovered in Lake Huron

The body of 34-year-old Lana Stempien was recovered in Lake Huron, about a quarter mile north of Hammond Bay Marina near Rogers City by a Michigan State Police Underwater Recovery Unit Wednesday, August 24.

Ms. Stempien, of Detroit, had been missing, along with Chuck Rutherford of Detroit, since their boat was found two miles off the southeast shore of Marquette Island in the Les Cheneaux Islands Friday, August 12. Hammond Bay is roughly 40 nautical miles from

the Les Cheneaux area.

Mr. Rutherford is still missing. Police identified Ms. Stempien's body through dental records, however, cause of death has not yet been determined. An autopsy is being conducted in Grand Rapids.

The U.S. Coast Guard helicopter crew from Traverse City assisted by flying over the Lake Huron coastline until dusk, looking for anything related to the incident.

A U.S. Coast Guard search for the two missing boaters was suspended Saturday, August 13.

The St. Ignace News
DEADLINE AND OFFICE HOURS
Labor Day

The St. Ignace News office in St. Ignace will be open
Monday, September 5 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.
The Hessel office will be closed Monday.

DISPLAY ADVERTISING DEADLINE
will remain 5:00 p.m. Friday.

CLASSIFIED DEADLINE
will remain 1:00 p.m. Monday.

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.