

Governor's Signature Secures Mackinac Bridge Authority's Role

By Karen Gould

A four-bill package that guarantees the continuation of the Mackinac Bridge Authority now and into the future was signed into law Wednesday, December 28.

"For decades, the Mackinac Bridge Authority has served as an effective steward of the Mackinac Bridge, and today, we are ensuring that its stewardship will continue for decades to come," Governor Jennifer Granholm told *The St. Ignace News* shortly after signing the historic documents.

The power of the governor's signature, the efforts of a state senator and two representatives, and the dedication of a bipartisan Authority board, resulted in legislation that allows the Authority to continue to manage bridge operations and freezes any future attempts by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to take control of Mackinac Bridge operations and its finances.

"The legislators, the governor, and the board all worked together for the best interest of the Mackinac Bridge and this will enable us to continue to run the Bridge the way it has been for over 50 years," said

Bob Sweeney, executive secretary of the Authority.

37th District State Senator Jason Allen, who sponsored two of the bills, agrees.

"The enactment of this legislation will ensure that the Mighty Mac will be cared for by the stewards who have watched over it for the last 50 years, the Mackinac Bridge Authority. Most importantly, it will prevent any future possibility of the Mackinac Bridge from being taken over by the state."

The Authority was established in 1950, seven years before the bridge was opened to traffic November 1, 1957. Last year, Gloria Jeff, director of MDOT, sought to streamline the operations by folding the operation into her department. To save money, she also proposed that the bridge maintenance fund be managed by the state, rather than by private investors, that the bridge be self-insured, and that major bridge maintenance be deferred.

Opposition to Ms. Jeff's actions led to a town meeting in St. Ignace, hosted by Senator Allen, and Governor Granholm stepped in later to negotiate an agreement between the Authority and MDOT that clar-

fied the Authority's role in management of the Mackinac Bridge. The new laws mirror the agreement and return to the Authority its traditional decision-making role over Mackinac Bridge matters, including insurance, risk management, engineering, and inspections. The Authority also is responsible for bridge operations, maintenance, repair, improvements, setting and collecting tolls, and managing bridge funds.

"Everybody was pulling on the same rope together, trying to do what was best for the Bridge," said Bill Gnodtke, chairman of the Mackinac Bridge Authority. "We've succeeded."

The four-bill package, SB 829, SB 830, HB 5333, and HB 5339, was sponsored by Senator Allen, 105th District Representative Kevin Elsenheimer, and 108th District representative Tom Casperson. The new laws outline the specific functions and responsibilities of the Mackinac Bridge Authority, specify that the Authority is an autonomous entity within MDOT, and codify the agreement the governor negotiated in September with the Authority and MDOT.

107th District Representative Gary McDowell of Rudyard was a key advisor to the governor's administration in shaping the September agreement and working on a bipartisan compromise on the new legislation, the governor's

office said.

"Just as the Mackinac Bridge represents an important connection between the Upper Peninsula and lower Michigan, this deal also reflects the strong partnerships that we can forge to better serve the citi-

zens of our great state," said Representative McDowell.

SB 829 repeals a section of Public Act 13 of 1966, that transfers operation of the Bridge to the State

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As snow dusts a tower during construction of the Mackinac Bridge, three unidentified riveters work to place the six million rivets that permanently connect the tower. (Photographs courtesy of the Mackinac Bridge Authority.)



Fifty years ago in 1956, with ice forming on lakes Michigan and Huron, and looking north toward St. Ignace, the Mackinac Bridge begins to take its place as part of the straits scenery.

Family Recipe: Pickford Woman Enjoys Carrying on Father's Meat Shop Trade

By Amy Polk

Like many children who grow up in a family-owned business, Jenny Leach didn't plan to take over her father's meat shop. But when her father retired 10 years ago and it looked like the business would have to be closed, she jumped in as the owner. She has changed the name from Freezer Pac to Downtown Meats and Deli, added modern fixtures and services, but continues to rely on her father's traditional products and skilled service.

For most of her decade in the business, Mrs. Leach has operated the shop with just two other women, Merilee Hall and Beverly Anderson, but in November, Anthony Frigo joined the staff. She also gets help from her mother and her children.

Butchering is a trade that requires strength and heavy lifting, which may be why only about 25 percent of the butchers in this country are women, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. The agency lists it as a non-traditional career for women.

"It's a male-dominated business," agrees Mrs. Leach, "with the meat, and the hunters, and the farmers. I don't know of any other female butchers. When I go to the food shows, it's usually all men who are there. My (wholesale meat) supplier has seven or eight guys working there and they all want to meet me because I'm a girl. One of the times I really enjoy doing this is during deer season. The men come in and want to talk to the butcher, and they're always surprised to find out it's me. They would always start talking to my brother first, when he worked here."

Hefting huge carcasses and hunks of meat to the tables and saws where they are processed has mostly been replaced by strategic equipment placement, conveyor belts, and rails. In most meat processing facilities, carcasses hang on hooks and are pulled along a system of rails that hang from the ceiling.

"My brothers all lifted their share of beef long ago, when we didn't have the rails system and the boys lifted all the beef by hand," Mrs. Leach said. "They grew a lot of muscle that way."

Mrs. Leach and her crew remove bones, cut, slice, and grind meat. They prepare roasts, hot dogs and sausages, lunch meats, and fancy meats. The staff advises customers on how to cook meats and gives them recipes, or customers can pick up one of the marinades or rubs available at the store.

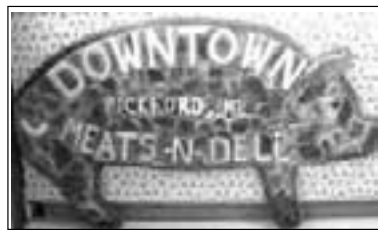
Downtown Meats carries an array of homemade meat products, including three flavors of beef jerky, turkey jerky, summer sausage, hot dogs, polish sausage, German and ring bologna, breakfast sausage, three types of bacon, Dutch loaf, beef and pepper sticks, roast beef, and ham. The store



Jenny Rye Leach has owned and operated Downtown Meats and Deli in Pickford for 10 years.



Downtown Meats and Deli owner Jenny Leach (right) trains Anthony Frigo, the shop's first male employee in 10 years.



Donnie Kirt and Troy Leach made the distinctive pig that greets visitors to their store. The sign is made of local sandstone and rope and has deer hooves for feet.

offers its own version of regional specialties like chorizo, a traditional Mexican sausage, and andouille, a Cajun sausage used in gumbo. Downtown also produces a Mexican cheese sausage in the summertime.

"One of the things I really like about our stuff is that most of our meats are homemade," Mrs. Leach said. "But it's too hard to make everything homemade," so she rounds out the meat cases with a few things from other suppliers, like poultry products and cheese.

The shop smokes its meats in a 600-pound-capacity smoker.

Jenny Leach's father, Roy Rye,

established the butcher shop in 1963 and called it Freezer Pac. The name came from a type of frozen meat package Mr. Rye sold that packaged several meats together for one price. The package contained the types of meats families typically ordered, like a few one-pound packages of ground beef, a couple pounds of sausage and bacon, stewing chickens, and a couple of roasts. Mr. Rye, who formerly worked in the A&P meat department in Sault Ste. Marie, developed the packs by watching what the customers typically ordered when they stocked up on meat.

Downtown still offers at least three different freezer packs for the convenience of customers.

Mrs. Leach, now 36, said she was "practically born in the shop," and began working there as a child, like her children do now.

"They had me doing all kinds of things, like scrubbing and cleaning," she said. "Eventually I was labeled as an apprentice, and learned everything from my dad."

She continues to use her father's time-tested recipes, with

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Case Resolved for Moran Twp. Burned Mail Safeguards To Prevent Further Problems

By Paul Gingras

A postal mail carrier who destroyed mail in Moran Township in 2004 has been fined \$1,500 and placed in home detention for the offense. Keven L. Vieau of Mackinaw City was found guilty of Obstruction of Correspondence by the United States District Court, Western District of Michigan, in Marquette. Mr. Vieau appeared before Judge Robert Holmes Bell.

According to St. Ignace Postmaster Bill Norton, Mr. Vieau's action appears to be the result of frustration owing to insufficient training.

Nearly two years after the incident, a folder of half-burned mail still sits in the office of Jim Durm, supervisor of Moran Township.

Grievances about mail delivery were pouring into the Moran Township hall around the time the crime occurred, Mr. Durm said. Residents complained that mail was delivered to incorrect addresses along US-2.

Mr. Vieau was substituting for mail carrier Frank Backus, who was new to the job himself. Mr. Backus replaced Clint Powers, a 30-year veteran mail carrier who passed away April 11, 2003.

According to Mr. Durm, Mr. Vieau struggled for several days to find the addresses he needed. Eventually, he attempted to destroy his burden, which included tax payments and bank statements. What remained of the mail bag was found in Mackinaw City, Mr. Durm added.

The rural route is serviced by contracted mail carriers, rather than

U.S. Postal Service employees. Postmaster Norton said this is done to save money. The lowest bidder tends to get the route, Mr. Durm added. Rural postal carriers are hired by the district head of the U.S. Postal Service in Chicago and do not receive employee benefits.

Very little training is provided for rural mail carriers, Mr. Norton said. Generally, they are trained for a few days by someone who knows the route. Mr. Backus, however, began at a disadvantage. Owing to the death of his predecessor, he was hired as an emergency replacement. Eventually, he became the regular contractor.

Contractors have the right to subcontract. He hired Mr. Vieau to take his place during his two-week absence, Mr. Norton said.

"Mr. Vieau got overwhelmed," Mr. Norton added. "When the route turned out to be a lot harder than expected, he panicked."

The proper procedure in such a situation is to return the mail to the post office in St. Ignace, where Mr. Norton takes over and re-sends it with a city postal worker.

"More training would have helped," Mr. Norton said. "A few more days under supervision, and Mr. Vieau may have been more comfortable with the route."

Roughly 12 tax payments were burned, said Nora Massey, deputy treasurer of Mackinac County, but taxpayers were able to resubmit their payments.

"We didn't make anybody who explained what happened pay fines," she said. "We were very lib-

eral." The result of Mr. Vieau's actions changed how taxes are collected in Moran Township, however.

Susan Dionne took the post of chief deputy treasurer shortly after the incident. To avoid such a problem from happening in the future, she set up a post office box in St. Ignace.

Now, most residents send payments to Moran Township's post office box. Mrs. Dionne, who is also the township treasurer, picks them up.

Mr. Backus has since been replaced by Pete Schwesinger of Trout Lake. In turn, he has subcontracted Norm Ball to deliver the mail along the US-2 route in Moran Township.

Moran Twp. Filing Deadline Is Feb. 7

In the December 29 issue it was reported that the deadline for Moran Township residents interested in running for the two open seats on the Gros Cap School board was April 2.

The correct date and time is February 7, by 4 p.m., said Kris Vallier, township clerk.

Residents interested in running must first notify the school, she added, and have a petition signed by a minimum of five, and a maximum of 10, registered township voters. An affidavit of identity is required. These forms are available at the Township Hall or Gros Cap School.

Affidavits and petitions are due at the township hall. There are no regular hours. Applicants can find out when the building is open by calling 643-7208.