

Our Hero Too – Fallen Waterford Soldier Has Ties to St. Ignace

U.S. Army Specialist Andrew Waits Dreamed of Law Enforcement Career

By Ryan Schlehuber

Many people in St. Ignace may have not realized it but on Thursday, April 13, 2006, it lost a hero when U.S. Army Specialist Andrew Waits was killed by an explosive roadside device while driving a Humvee in Baghdad, Iraq.

Mr. Waits, 23, a Waterford Township resident and a 2001 graduate of Kettering High School, is the son of Diane (nee Mackin) Waits. She is originally from St. Ignace, a 1969 graduate of LaSalle High School.

His aunt, Patrice Mackin, an uncle, Paul Mackin, and a grandmother, Therese Mackin-Oja, still live here.

Andrew Waits' unit was deployed to Iraq in September 2005. He was a member of the 1st

Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, Second Brigade Combat Team, of the 101st Airborne Division, based in Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

He was able to enjoy a short leave, arriving home March 18, surprising his mother and his two sisters, Catherine, 28, and Laura, 19. They celebrated Laura's birthday early while he was there, knowing he would be back overseas by April 10. While home, he got the chance to see his hometown friends and his fiancée, Sarah Collias.

On Tuesday, April 4, he returned to Baghdad, and a week later, Mr. Waits was killed.

"My son was a real hero," said Ms. Waits. "He was so courageous."

"I'm really proud of him," said

Patrice Mackin.

"I loved him," Uncle Paul Mackin simply said. "He was a good kid."

The small boy his mother and his aunt remember grew to be the man they knew he would become.

"The whole time he was in the United States, on leave, he was worried about his friends from camp who were back in Iraq," said Ms. Mackin.

"It makes you realize how much courage it takes," said Ms. Waits, about her son and the thousands of soldiers in Iraq and other areas with conflict. "He was on the front line. They didn't know if they'd make it through each day. I can't imagine the courage it took to do that. It wasn't just my son that had that courage, though; every one of those guys in that infantry does."

He was courageous and honorable, she added. He was passionate about his country. Ever since he was a little boy, he had dreams of being in law enforcement and



U.S. Army Specialist Andrew Waits with his mother, Diane Mackin Waits. (Photograph courtesy of Patrice Mackin)

aspired to work in the Oakland County Sheriff's Department. If he was your friend, said Ms. Waits, he was your best friend.

"He was the most kind-hearted person you'd ever meet," she added. "He was a great son and a protective brother."

Andrew Waits traveled with his mother and two sisters each summer to visit family here, enjoying a day on Mackinac Island, sometimes renting a cabin on Brevort Lake, or just staying with Aunt Patrice.

"My fondest memory of Andrew was during my mother's 75th birthday four years ago," said Ms. Mackin. "They all came up from Waterford and he helped me make posters and signs for the party."

The small boy who loved playing the guitar loved music and playing basketball, the boy who was a good third baseman in the Waterford Coaches Association baseball league, the boy who his mother remembers always taking his fishing pole to fish just across the street from home, is now gone.

Andrew Waits was given a hero's send-off at his funeral in Waterford Saturday, April 22. Hundreds of people paid their respects to him outside of St. Perpetua Roman Catholic Church in Waterford Township. An Army representative presented Ms. Waits with her son's Bronze Star and the Purple Heart during the funeral, and Andrew Waits was deputized posthumously by Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard.

"Waterford Township is much bigger than St. Ignace in size, but you would've thought it was St. Ignace that day because everyone came out to support Andrew," his mother said. "There were signs all over saying 'Thank You Spec. Andrew Waits.' The people of Waterford Township are amazing."

Emergency vehicles were stationed at every intersection leading to Ottawa Park Cemetery, where Mr. Waits was buried, and each officer stood at attention as the hearse drove by. Also along were the Patriot Guard Riders, who rode

*Please turn to page 11



Tickets Available for Masonic Lodge's DARE Breakfast

St. Ignace residents are now purchasing tickets for the 11th Annual DARE Breakfast to be hosted by the Masonic Lodge Sunday, May 7, at Northbay Inn Restaurant from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Education projects of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program will benefit from proceeds of the breakfast. Pictured lining up to purchase breakfast tickets are (from left) Clair Kalbfleisch of the Masonic Lodge, St. Ignace Mayor Paul Grondin, Police Chief Tim Matelski, DARE Education Officer Fred Strich, Lieutenant Curt Robertson of Michigan State Police, City Manager Eric Dodson, County Prosecutor Clayton Graham, and Ernie Krause of the Masonic Lodge. Tickets cost \$7 per adult, \$4 per child, and are available from any Masonic Lodge member or at the door. All proceeds remain in Mackinac County for use in drug abuse education in local schools.

Communication, Business Outreach Top Chamber Goals

St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce Also Plans To Revive Community Think Tank

By Ellen Paquin

Planners at the St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce have identified four goals needed to solidify the Chamber mission as a free-standing organization following its split last year with the Visitors Bureau. They are to improve communications with members and the community, to secure the organization's financial future, to create and administer a community-wide think tank, and to strengthen business resources.

The first two goals focus on building the organization from within, while the last two are an outreach effort intended to build a stronger community and to better assist St. Ignace businesses, said Chamber President Cheryl Schlehuber.

"The entire Chamber board has made a really strong commitment to working on these new goals," Mrs. Schlehuber said. "I've served for years on the Chamber board, and this is the most excited I've ever been about our efforts. I think we're on the right path to make this a real working Chamber."

The goals are the result of planning sessions that the nine-member board and Director Janet Peterson began in January with the help of Angela Nebel of Sault Ste. Marie. Ms. Nebel's consulting firm was hired with a \$1,500 contribution from the St. Ignace Downtown Development Authority.

The 215 members of the Chamber of Commerce were surveyed in January about perceptions of the agency's strengths and weaknesses as part of the goal-setting process.

The board wants to revive a

community think tank called Mackinac Action Council to deal with community concerns. Some years ago, Mrs. Schlehuber said, that group met to brainstorm how to make the Father Marquette National Memorial more accessible and proposed building a bridge from the state visitors center and Straits State Park over the highway. The pedestrian bridge plan was abandoned when the memorial's museum was destroyed by fire.

"The group also pushed the new Bridge Park idea," Mrs. Schlehuber said, "which was eventually built with help from Mackinac Bridge Authority representation on the council."

"We have been thinking that we need this kind of organization again," Mrs. Schlehuber said, "a brainstorming group that would be a Chamber-sponsored program, open to the whole community. Anyone who would like to be involved from any organization could take part. Working together not only with our community agencies, but with our surrounding communities as well, in the best interest of our region, will benefit us all."

Toward the goal of strengthening resources for St. Ignace businesses, Mrs. Schlehuber said the Chamber of Commerce would plan to offer more information that business owners need, such as tips for writing grant proposals.

"We can be a better information resource for local businesses," she said. "With the county EDC (Economic Development Corporation) operating on a shoestring

*Please turn to page 9

Trash Company Assures City Recyclables Are Handled Properly

By Ryan Schlehuber

A representative of Waste Management, although unable to attend a St. Ignace City Council meeting as planned Monday, May 1, has assured city officials that the company is properly handling recyclable materials. The discussion was initiated by questions about the company's practices presented to council by city attorney Prentiss M. Brown at an earlier meeting. City Council and Waste Management will meet May 15 to discuss the issue further.

St. Ignace Mayor Paul Grondin told council that Waste Management District Director Daryl Proulx, who oversees waste pick-up and handling in St. Ignace, Newberry, and Sault Ste. Marie, was unable to make this meeting, however, Mr. Proulx will meet with council May 15, at council's next regular meeting, to shore up any concerns Mr. Brown or Waste Management customers may have about the company's recycling process.

Toward the end of council's regular meeting Monday, April 17, Mr. Brown asked Council to address complaints about Waste Management having irregular open hours and not properly disposing of recycled items.

The St. Ignace News visited Waste Management's transfer station on Cheeseman Road in St. Ignace Wednesday, April 19, as did Mayor Grondin and City Manager Eric Dodson to see the company's recycling system first-hand.

Mr. Proulx said there can be no cutting corners in this business.

"Waste Management is very, very picky," said Mr. Proulx. "We have strict regulations. We have to do things in a particular way, for health and safety requirements, and for economic reasons."

Mr. Proulx explained that recycled items are picked up every second and fourth Wednesday of each month in St. Ignace. Each Wednesday and Friday, his main truck driver, Todd Insley, picks up refuse from about 17 commercial

garbage bins, while Tuesdays and Thursdays are for residential pickups.

"People may be confused because we do pick up garbage and recycled items with the same truck and on the same day [Wednesdays] but not at the same time," he said.

Mr. Insley said each second and fourth Wednesday of the month, he picks up recycled items and hauls the load back to the transfer station, where it is dumped on the transfer station floor, cleared of any non-recycled items, and then scooped up by a backhoe and placed in its own separate dumpster. Mr. Insley then begins his garbage pick-up route.

Once five bins of recycled items are filled, they are transferred into receiver bins, which have individual sections that can be filled with both cardboard and other recycled items separately. Mr. Proulx said the bin is hauled to the Chippewa County recycling center in Sault Ste. Marie.

The company consolidates trips to Sault Ste. Marie to save on truck fuel, Mr. Proulx said.

As for open hours on the weekend, Mr. Proulx said the transfer station used to be open on Saturday but the majority of requests have been for more open hours on weekdays.

From April to September, the transfer station is open from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. On Wednesdays, it is open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. It is closed on Saturdays.

Mr. Insley told Mayor Grondin and Mr. Dodson that Waste Management has always posted its open hours at the facility and through the newspaper, however, he pointed out that the city's community television channel did not have the updated information. Mr. Dodson said that will be remedied.

As for the city owning the building, Mr. Brown reiterated his April 17 statement the building's deed is in the hands of Waste Management, however, it has many restrictions on it.

"They have the deed, but the city has the right to buy it if they ever bug out," Mr. Brown told Council.



Waste Management employee Todd Insley dumps in a load of recycled items during his routine recycled items pick-up day, Wednesday, April 26. The company picks up recycled items in St. Ignace every second and fourth Wednesdays of the month. Mr. Insley also collects refuse from commercial bins on Wednesdays, however, it is after he has unloaded the recycled items he collected from residents.



Waste Management District Director Daryl Proulx shows one of five bins loaded with recycled items collected from residential neighborhoods in St. Ignace. Once the five bins of recycled items and cardboard are filled, the loads are then transferred to a recycling center in Sault Ste. Marie.

Lions Club Plans May 13 Auction

Fishing Charter, Gift Certificates Among Prizes

The St. Ignace Lions Club is gathering prizes for its Saturday, May 13, Lions Roar Auction, and organizers are pleased with the variety of auction items coming in, said Paula McNamara of the Lions Club. The fundraiser, a family event offering free pizza, pop, and a benefit cupcake raffle, will be from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at St. Ignace Middle School. The auctioneer will be Charlie Fowler of St. Ignace.

A half-day fishing charter from Dennis Gorsuch of St. Ignace, valued at \$400, and dining certificates from Grand Hotel's new restaurant, The Gate House, and Iroquois Hotel, both on Mackinac Island, will be offered for auction to the highest bidder, as will many gift certificates from local businesses.

"We are very pleased with the prizes we've collected for the auction, and the overwhelming generosity of the town in supporting the event," Ms. McNamara said. "We will offer a handmade Adirondack chair from Fred Strich and beautiful photographs by David Latva and Dave Kunze."

Many St. Ignace and Mackinac Island merchants contributed merchandise for the event, Ms. McNamara said.

A highlight of the auction will be a \$5 drawing for a lucky cupcake containing a pearl and emerald ring.

Proceeds from the auction will benefit future projects of the St. Ignace Lions Club, including scholarships and participation in sight-saving programs.