

First Summer Holiday Weekend Brings Mixed Results in Visitor Numbers

Historic Park Sites, Ferries Report Traffic Up

By Karen Gould

More visitors toured Mackinac State Historic Park sites over the Memorial holiday this year than last, and one ferry line reported an increase in travelers to Mackinac Island, although counts at the Mackinac Bridge were down, leaving no clear glimpse of summer traffic in the wake of the first big holiday of the season.

A 3.25 percent increase with visitors exploring Fort Mackinac, Colonial Michilimackinac, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, and Historic Mill Creek occurred from Saturday, May 27, through

Tuesday, May 30, said Tim Putman, public relations and marketing officer for the parks.

During a similar period, from Thursday, May 25, through Tuesday, May 30, Mackinac Bridge traffic was down 1.32 percent over last year, reported Bob Sweeney, executive secretary of the Mackinac

Bridge Authority. He did note, however, that crossings on Friday through Sunday were up over last year.

Overall, 92,415 cars made the crossing during the five day period, compared to 93,652 in 2005, said Mr. Sweeney.

Mr. Sweeney also analyzed statistics going back six years and found no parallel between

Memorial Day weekend bridge traffic and summer traffic.

He said traffic fell last year when gas prices rose.

"Memorial Day travel is a general indicator," he said, "but there are other factors that can affect the season."

Tom Pfeiffelmann, general manager of Star Line Ferry, said the numbers of passengers traveling to

Mackinac Island were up over last year, both in crossings from St. Ignace and in Mackinac City.

Dave Ramsay, dockmaster with Star Line said business might have been even better if the weather had cooperated on Sunday. He said people tended to hold off going to Mackinac Island in the morning, waiting until the rain stopped.

Mr. Putman at the state park agreed. Sunday, he said, was the only soft day at Mackinac State Historic Parks during the long weekend.

Mr. Ramsay said travelers he talked with from Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin, and lower Michigan last weekend may indicate that people are going to take shorter trips this year. He speculated high gas prices will keep summer travelers closer to home.

Bill Shepler, president of Shepler's Mackinac Island Ferry, said that over the holiday business was up slightly over last year, and that more passengers traveled to the Island on Saturday this year, compared to 2005.

"Had the weather not turned on Sunday, we would have had a bang-up weekend," said Mr. Shepler, referring to rains that did not let up until approximately 1 p.m.

Leading into the Memorial Day holiday, attendance at Mackinac State Historic Parks was mixed. Group tours, primarily school children, were down 12 percent, but individual and family attendance was up 21 percent. The poor school attendance could be a reflection of strained school budgets, said Phil Porter, director of Mackinac State Historic Parks at the Mackinac Island State Park Commission meeting Saturday, May 27.

The early statistics cover fewer than 25 days since the fairs opened and do not include the Memorial Day holiday period.

New interest has been sparked with Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse following years of renovations and attendance is up 96 percent, which Mr. Porter attributes to additional marketing to school groups.

Overall park attendance is down seven percent from last year prior to the holiday weekend, and Fort Mackinac's visitor count dropped 11 percent. Colonial Michilimackinac attendance is down four percent and Historic Mill Creek is down 10 percent.

Arnold Transit Company was contacted for this story, but could not return calls before press time.

Kids Fishing Action Planned for Saturday Prizes Given in 10th Annual Fishing Day

Area children can enjoy free fishing and outdoor fun Saturday, June 10, during the 10th annual Kids Fishing Day, sponsored by the Straits Area sportsmen's Club. The event will be at Castle Rock Ponds, on the Hiawatha National Forest, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and is being held in conjunction with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Summer Free Fishing Weekend, when all fishing license fees are waived.

Castle Rock Ponds is on Castle Rock Road, just past the North State Street overpass across I-75 at Exit 348. There will be signs posted near all entrances to the area to guide participants.

More than 200 kids and nearly 150 adults made their way to Castle Rock Ponds last year.

Children can enjoy the fishing experience in two ways at the event. One is at a 1,500-gallon holding tank that will be brought in by the St. Ignace Fire Department. The tank will hold 200 rainbow trout purchased from the Cedarbrook Trout Farm in Harrisville. Young anglers will be able to fish the tank for about five minutes, in groups of four, in hopes of catching a 10-inch to 14-inch rainbow or brown trout. Catch-and-release will be practiced during the event, so that the fish can later be used to stock the pond.

Young anglers can also fish at the nearby ponds, which are bigger and provide more of a challenge.

Rangers from the Hiawatha National Forest will be handing out packets with fishing lures and hooks. About 100 prizes will be raffled every five minutes for children ages 16 and younger who pick up a ticket when they come in.

The event will feature free refreshments and the St. Ignace Lions Club will provide a large tent that will encompass the food service and prize holding areas. Other agencies participating include the Michigan State University 4-H Youth Program, Tri-County Wildlife Unlimited, and the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians.

Library Friends To Meet; Reading Forms Available

St. Ignace Friends of the Library will meet Monday, June 12, at 7 p.m. at the library.

Children's summer reading achievement log sheets will be available at the library June 12. Children may complete the records of reading achievement through the summer to earn prizes from the library.

Child Care Business Program Is Tuesday

A free program will offer information for how to start a licensed child care business Tuesday, June 13, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the Mackinac County Department of Human Services office. The program is sponsored by 4C of the U.P., an information resource for parents and child care providers. Registration is requested at 643-6123.



St. Ignace Lighthouse Goes Up June 6

Top: Inside the lighthouse, Roy Kohn (top) and foreman Wayne Tripp of Fisher Contracting of Midland bolt the second section of the beacon to the base unit. Fisher Contracting dismantled the lighthouse after St. Ignace acquired it from the Monroe Welcome Center in the fall of 2004. The company returned to St. Ignace this week to set it in place at the end of the old Railroad Dock.

At right: The final sections of the new St. Ignace lighthouse are being lowered into place in a coordinated effort between the St. Ignace Department of Public Works, Fisher Contracting of Midland, Maverick Construction of St. Ignace, and Weiss Builders of St. Ignace. Crews worked together to erect the lighthouse that will serve as a sentinel to the city's marina. At left, job foreman Wayne Tripp of Fisher Contracting directs the placement of the last two sections of the five-section beacon that were attached before being hoisted by the crane. Also with Fisher Contracting, Robert Davis holds the line to help steady the sections as they are lowered into place. The crane was extended to 80 feet to complete the job. Once the sections are bolted together, the lighthouse will rise 52 feet into the air.



90 Attend Mackinaw City Energy Conference

By Paul Gingras

Mackinaw City's Energy Conference drew 90 representatives from school districts and villages, counties, and cities from northern lower Michigan and the Upper Peninsula Thursday, May 18. Attendees listened to presentations and discussed infrastructure improvements and energy efficiency projects they could implement to combat skyrocketing energy prices.

Mackinaw City makes a good venue for such a conference, said Steve Schnell, community development director for the village, because the municipality already has invested in wind turbines, put in modern lighting systems, and noted a dramatic decrease in energy costs.

"We learned a lot from our energy efficiency audits and felt like we had great deal to share,"

Mr. Schnell said. "We are probably going to have another conference next year."

Sessions covered everything from group purchasing of power to wind and solar energy.

The most popular session was about energy efficient lighting. Inefficient T12 fluorescent lights are quickly becoming outmoded and can be replaced with T8, T5, and Compact Fluorescent Lights (CFLs) and Light-emitting diodes (LED), said Jeff McDonald of Ohio-based Technical Consumer Products.

The second highest-rated session detailed energy audits offered free by the Michigan Department of Energy. These audits provide detailed analysis of energy use for municipal and school buildings, said Kevin Cook, owner of G-Energy Services, a 20-year veteran in the energy field who has con-

ducted more than 4,000 energy audits.

The Energy Star program also drew a great deal of interest. The program is offered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and provides residents and businesses with information on how to choose energy efficient products. Americans operating under Energy Star guidelines "saved enough energy in 2005 alone to avoid greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those from 23 million cars, and saved \$12 billion on their utility bills," reports the agency.

A session on Efficiency for Municipal Utilities and Building Controls was rated almost as highly. It discussed ways in which municipalities can upgrade traffic lights, water system components, street lighting, and heating, ventilating, and air conditioning tech-

By Ryan Schlehner

Lynn Walton of Walton Helicopter has been invited by the St. Ignace City Council to attend a Special Events Committee meeting Monday, June 12, to negotiate an agreement as to where he can operate his helicopter ride business during the Antique Auto Show weekend June 23 to 25.

At its meeting Monday, June 5, Council agreed that Walton Helicopter will no longer be permitted to operate his helicopter ride business at the Chief Dock downtown, directly behind Mackinac Grille Restaurant, owing to several complaints from residents and business owners. Councilman Don Gustafson, who made the motion, said the action taken does not mean the city is turning Walton Helicopter away from business during the event.

City Manager Eric Dodson said Mr. Walton, to his knowledge, never applied or was given a vendor's permit since the city assumed ownership of the dock from Star Line.

"I agree with Council," said show producer Ed Reavie. "I love helicopters, but with the noise and dust that it causes, it upsets people too much."

Mr. Reavie said the helicopter rides worked well operating from Little Bear East Ice Arena and Conference Center during the annual Truck Show, however, Councilman Tom Della-Moretta said there may be a problem with dust being kicked up by the helicopter there. Council did agree that Walton Helicopter, wherever it operates, will need to purchase necessary insurance documentation.

The Special Events Committee meets at 4 p.m. at City Hall, Monday, June 12.

St. Ignace Water and Sewer Department will apply for a one-time grant through the state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) that may save the city \$4.3 million in the long run with improvements to water and sewer facilities. If the \$300,000 grant is awarded (the city should know by October), it would pay about 90 percent of the costs of planning and engineering for several projects totaling \$4.7 million, which DEQ has mandated the city to complete in 2008 and 2009.

Force main upgrades on Reagon and LeMotte streets must be completed by 2008. In 2009, the Water and Sewer Department must replace its pond liners, its Heritage lift station, and improve its disinfection and screening systems at its wastewater treatment plant. Although not mandated, the department will also seek to improve some of its sewer collection systems near homes, said Mr. Therrian.

To pay for the construction, the city will obtain a 20-year loan at 1.6 percent interest from the DEQ's revolving fund, which

Helicopter Operator To Seek New Location During Car Show Resident Complaints Move Vendor Off Chief Dock

annual payments of roughly \$255,000 a year.

Mr. Therrian said this option is better than the department's original plan, which was to seek a 40-year loan through the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development at four percent interest. Yearly payments for this loan would be approximately \$235,000.

"We're going to be paying more each year, but we'll be paying the loan off faster, saving about \$4.3 million in interest, overall," Mr. Therrian said.

The city is working with its consulting engineers, Wilcox Professional Services Design/Build Ventures, in applying for the DEQ grant.

In related action, Ordinance 608, the water and sewer rate ordinance, was adopted by Council, which keeps rates as they are now through January 31, 2007.

The water rate is \$4.72 per 1,000 gallons, while the sewer rate is \$3.68 per 1,000 gallons.

Council agreed to settle with SEMCO Energy Gas Company and pay back \$5,251 in tax revenue. Treasurer Eugene Elmer said it would cost the city more to fight the company at the state tax tribunal level, where the company has already been successful at winning legal debates over other communities and the state.

St. Ignace Township and Garfield Township have already settled and Moran Township's decision still is pending.

"The handwriting is on the wall," said Mr. Elmer.

SEMCO had tax protests pending in approximately 180 communities, and, according to the company, approximately 80 have now been resolved. The city received a settlement offer from SEMCO last fall, concerning its gas distribution property tax protest. The city had 60 days from April 26, 2006, to respond.

A resolution of support of the North Huron Scenic Pathway project was approved by council. The project is a collaborative effort by several municipalities to create a 70-mile bicycle path from St. Ignace to Drummond Island.

Project President Deb Evashovski, also the city's Downtown Development Authority (DDA) director, said each community involved will have a say as to where the path will be, with the understanding that the pathway must connect to its adjoining neighbor. She said she is hoping the pathway will be paved to allow in-line skaters to use it, as well.

Marianne Huskey, coordinator of watercraft races to be held at the American Legion Park July 8 and 9, was allowed by Council to use part of the city's railroad dock for parking. Mrs. Huskey also received permission to use parking space at Star Line and Mackinac Grille Restaurant by the business owners.