

Star Line Boat *Nicolet* To Begin Serving New York's Long and Fire Islands

By Karen Gould

Sailing to her new home at Long Island, New York, Star Line's ferry *Nicolet* will navigate three Great Lakes, the Atlantic Ocean, rivers, canals, and more than 45 locks. The seven-day, 1,000 mile journey will begin September 11, and in New York, she will transport passengers between Long Island and Fire Island.

After 21 years on the Straits of Mackinac, where she ferried visitors between St. Ignace and Mackinac Island, she has been sold to Davis Park Ferry Company of Patchogue, New York.

Star Line has simply outgrown the little boat, which holds 150 passengers. It has been in service as one of two backups in the six-boat fleet, but now the company believes it can get by with only one backup.



The *Nicolet* leaves the Star Line Railroad Dock in St. Ignace on her way to Mackinac Island Monday, August 28.

"We don't have a need for it," said Tom Pfeiffelmann, Star Line's general manager. "We now have two larger boats, the *Radisson* and the *Marquette II*," which serve the St. Ignace run.

The *Radisson* holds 350 people, and the *Marquette II*, which the company bought last year, can transport 330 people.

The first *Marquette*, was also sold to Davis Park Ferry Company, two years ago.

"We had it for 25 years," Mr. Pfeiffelmann said. "It's now their best and newest boat."

Star Line had the *Nicolet* built by Gulf Craft, Inc. of Patterson, Louisiana, in 1985.

Davis Park Marine operates ferry boats between Long Island and the Davis Park community on Fire Island, which is a barrier island off the coast of New York and a designated national seashore. Like Mackinac Island, there are no cars on Fire Island.

Mike North, a 14-year Star Line veteran who pilots the *Nicolet* to and from Mackinac Island most days, will be at the helm at 5 a.m. Monday, September 11, when it departs for New York. He will be joined by Star Line's Mackinac Island dock master, Tom Bushman, and three or four men from Davis Park Ferry Company.

Mr. North piloted *Marquette* to Patchogue two years ago and said he expects the locks along the way to be filled with recreational craft, but the journey will also include exciting scenery, including sailing by Manhattan and the Statue of Liberty. He isn't worried about sea conditions.

"We're out here in everything," he said of the Straits of Mackinac. "You can't really pick and choose

the weather, and the boats are really safe and we take the proper precautions."

During the trip, the men will eat and sleep on the *Nicolet*, and if the weather cooperates, he plans to sleep outside on the top deck, as he did two years ago.

The only modification to the *Nicolet* will be to remove her mast so she can fit under some of the bridges in the Erie Canal.

His greatest concern on the trip will be recreational boaters, as it is here. Recreationalists are often out in conditions they are not equipped to handle, he said. He recalled a foggy trip where his radar picked up an object by the old fuel caissons in Moran Bay. Since he wasn't sure what the objects were, he sailed near the area and found two men floating on surf boards in the dense fog.

He said the captains of all three ferry lines that serve Mackinac Island radio each other when situations like that occur.

"There is a lot of communication between captains," he said. "That's nice to have."

During the trip to New York, he will communicate with the U.S. Coast Guard's Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) as he approaches the Detroit River and then again when he nears the New York Harbor. The VTS monitors vessels in busy waterways, much like air traffic control operates for airplane traffic. Mr. North is required to tell the VTS where he is coming from and where he is heading.

In preparation for the trip, he has begun reviewing navigational charts and making plans for fueling and overnight stops. The boat holds



Veteran Captain Mike North of Star Line Mackinac Island Ferry will be at the helm of the *Nicolet* as she makes her 1,000 mile journey to a new berth on Long Island, New York.

approximately 900 gallons of fuel and, to reduce trip costs, he will line up fuel trucks to avoid the higher cost of fuel at marinas.

From St. Ignace, they will travel approximately 250 miles down Lake Huron to the St. Clair River, then along the Detroit River and into Lake Erie. At the other end of the lake, they will enter the Welland Canal to Lake Ontario, then into the Erie Canal to the Hudson River and the Atlantic Ocean.

The first night out, they will refuel and dock overnight at Harsens Island, near Detroit. The second night will be in Dunkirk, New York, in the southeast corner of Lake Erie. The will refuel again before entering the 26-mile-long Welland Canal, which has eight locks that will drop them approximately 326 feet to Lake Ontario. That will take a day.

Third night is planned in Youngstown, New York, before heading east to Oswego, New York, which is at the entrance to the Erie Canal. Before entering the canal, they will refuel and replenish supplies. The low bridges in the canal make it necessary for the crew to remove radar, antennas, and the mast from atop the pilot

house and, even then, they expect less than an inch of clearance between the boat and the underside of some bridges.

Much of the trip will be spent getting through the Erie Canal, which is more than 500 miles long and links the Great Lakes to the Hudson River through a series of lakes and rivers across the State of New York. It contains about 40 locks.

"It's a little challenging with all the little boats," said Mr. North. "You have to worry about not bumping into them because they really cram in a lot of boats into a lock, and we have to worry about the current," he said. "It's pretty challenging, but it's fun."

When in the Erie Canal and not in a lock, the speed limit is 10 miles per hour and travel is like sailing on the Cheboygan River, he said. The canal is narrow, with homes along the shore. He said during his last trip, children ran out of the houses to wave as they passed by, since the ferry boats are larger than the recreational traffic on the canal.

"These boats are big to them," he said. "Out here, we have freighters," he said of the Straits of Mackinac.

During the trip, he will not operate Star Line's signature roostertail water spray that arches up behind the boat, though he probably will turn it on occasionally for children and when they pass by New York City and the Statue of Liberty. There, he said, it gets attention from the ferries in the harbor.

"Between the cities, small towns, locks, and canals, it is an amazing trip," he said. "Everywhere we stop, the boat draws interest."

Patchogue, on Long Island, is about 40 miles from Manhattan.

Mr. North said he is looking forward to the trip and traveling with the people he sailed with two years ago.

"We all just get along great, because we all have the same interest," he said. "If this trip goes half as well as the *Marquette* one did, I'd be pleased with that."

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Used Book Sale Set for Sept. 2

A used book sale will be held at the St. Ignace Public Library Saturday, September 2, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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