

Chamber Attributes Drop in Enrollments to Confusion Over Rates, Services

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In January 2005, after a planning session to sharpen its goals toward marketing the hotel sector, the Visitors Bureau shifted its participation in some community programs and re-established its office at a new location, splitting from the Chamber of Commerce. The requirement that hotel owners pay Chamber of Commerce dues was eliminated.

Soon after, a new fee schedule developed by the Visitors Bureau offered businesses a listing in the Vacation Guide and on the Web site for a \$100 fee. To some business owners, Mrs. Peterson said, this looked like a bargain over paying traditional Chamber of Commerce dues. The bureau also set up an associate membership, costing \$500, that entitles any non-hotel business, such as retailers or boat lines, the opportunity to serve on the Visitors Bureau board and have a vote in proceedings.

Kelly Simmons, director of the Visitors Bureau, said memberships in that organization remain at 38. Nine associate members joined the Visitors Bureau this year, she said, and most are also members of the Chamber of Commerce, which indicates they did not replace Chamber memberships with Visitors Bureau associate memberships.

Business owners who pay to be listed in the Vacation Guide without full Chamber membership are losing out on valuable services such as telephone, fax, and e-mail referrals, health insurance discounts, brochure distribution, and bulk mailing discounts, say members of the Chamber board. That is the message they will bring to business owners in the coming weeks.

"It's possible they don't feel

like they're getting value for their money, but there is a lot to understand about Chamber membership," said Cheryl Schlehber, president of the board, while pointing out the services offered by the Chamber.

While some business owners question whether the Chamber of Commerce provides a valuable tool or directly benefits their business, Mrs. Peterson wants them to also consider the agency's role in the community.

The Chamber of Commerce has a positive impact in the community, Mrs. Peterson said, by coordinating events for groups who don't have interest or experience in logistical planning. The Chamber of Commerce coordinates Autumn Apple Days, Sidewalk Sales, the Community Yard Sale, the Home for the Holidays Parade, Men's Shopping Night, Ladies' Shopping Night, the Underwater Treasure Hunt in conjunction with the Straits Underwater Preserve, Bayside Live and Locals on the Bay concerts with the Downtown Development Authority, Arts Dockside with a group of volunteers, the St. Ignace Salmon Derby with a group of volunteers, and the Gold Wing Midnight Ride with Kewadin Casino. The Chamber also takes some registrations for St. Ignace auto shows and sends mailings and takes registrations for three winter events on Moran Bay, the Ice Chip Golf Scramble,

snow softball, and snow volleyball, as well as distributes thousands of information packets, called "goodie bags," each year at the St. Ignace marina and campgrounds.

"For example, for the Salmon Derby, we develop the brochure, send mailings, take registrations, and answer phone questions for the Straits Area Sportsmen's Club and Pete Eversen, because they do not have the time or capacity to handle those projects, but they know how to run the fishing contest," Mrs. Peterson said.

In similar capacity, the Chamber of Commerce agreed Wednesday, September 13, to adopt and coordinate the Moran Mud Runs next year, taking over the event from Mackinac County Sportsmen's Off Road Vehicle Association and Jim and Bridget West of the Mackinac Mudders.

"Having this office here is valuable," Mrs. Peterson said. "We provide information on these and all community events. If someone wants to do a new event, we can help. That's what we do. Each event, whether it's a race, a fishing tournament, or a sled dog competition, draws its own unique target market to our town. I don't see the same people coming to the [now defunct] sled dog races that are coming to the Autumn Apple Days. We try to develop a broad, diverse base of people to draw from."

"We still want to serve the community and the people coming in. We have a positive group of people who have, in their hearts, the wish for St. Ignace to do well."

*— Janet Peterson,
Chamber of Commerce
director*

City To Choose New Recreation Coordinator

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and will be hired by Mr. Dodson without city council approval.

"The position is more than just being office personnel," Mr. Dodson said. "The day-to-day operations may include moving tables or going out onto the ball field, not just being behind the desk in the office."

Along with home games for St. Ignace midget hockey, the city will host hockey tournaments October 13, 14, and 28. The ice rink will open October 9.

In the meantime, Erica Cena, a graduate of Lake Superior State University, has been working part-time at Little Bear East Conference Center and Ice Arena since completing her 12-week summer internship with the city, assisting Mr. Dodson with the recreation programs until a coordinator is hired. She is one of the 18 applicants.

The new employee will coordinate and maintain the city's youth and adult recreation programs, such as youth soccer, baseball, and swim lessons. In addition, the person will oversee the swimming pool at LaSalle High School, athletic fields at McCann Field and at LaSalle, Silver Mountain Ski Hill operations, tennis and basketball courts, four parks, and Little Bear East, which includes a conference center, a hockey rink, and the fitness center.

ness center.

"I have a mile-long list of new ideas that I would like to see us implement," said Mr. Dodson.

The city is offering between \$26,000 to \$32,000 a year, plus a health, dental, and retirement plan.

With the winter recreation season looming, said Mr. Dodson, "This will be a trial by fire for whoever we hire. Hockey will be rolling by then."

The new person also will work

with the Recreation Advisory Committee in marketing Little Bear East to bring in more revenue-generating events which will offset the mounting utility expenses the facility incurs each year, and "We want to get more events, like the watercraft races we had in July," said Mr. Dodson.

"We'll be watching each of our expenditures for the Recreation Department much closer," said Mr. Dodson.

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Coyote Killed at Mackinac Island

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become more bold.

One or more coyotes have been observed downtown and in residential neighborhoods throughout the summer, possibly lured by an increasing rabbit population, and they have grown accustomed to humans and their activities. They have been frequently observed sunning themselves on roads and in corrals and appear tame.

Earlier this summer, the DNR warned residents not to feed or pet the animals.

"It's part of a growing concern," said Mr. Porter. "This is a pretty small place to have an increasing population of these animals."

Mr. Porter said prior to Thursday's incident, the Mackinac Island State Park staff had been discussing the issue with the DNR.

Mrs. Peterson said having a strong, committed volunteer Chamber of Commerce board and having time this fall to recruit more members are two strengths the agency can draw on to face its current financial difficulties. The nine-member board of directors has not yet discussed a strategy for any budget cuts owing to declining enrollment, she said.

"We still want to serve the community and the people coming in," Mrs. Peterson said. "We have a positive group of people who have, in their hearts, the wish for St. Ignace to do well. They have a strong concern for our community and are willing to donate their time and energy."

Despite the present financial difficulty, it's a positive sign that all members have said they are interested in continuing their terms of service in the October board election, she said, when three seats will expire on the board.

Serving on the Chamber of Commerce board are President Cheryl Schlehber, Vice President Jane Weiss, Treasurer Merv Wyse, Shirley Sorrels, Julie Lipnitz, Lora Brown, Elizabeth Brown, Rod Nelson, and Cathie Sposito. Mrs. Peterson serves as the board secretary.

"Our members have run the spectrum of opinions, asking themselves, 'Does the chamber do anything for my business?' They also should ask, 'Does the chamber do anything for the community?'" Mrs. Peterson said.

"If some of our business owners spent a day in this office, they would be amazed at the questions we get," she said. "The community has regarded the chamber as a source of information for more than just business."

Mrs. Peterson, who has been with the agency for 21 years, and seasonal employee Eileen Evers field the questions that come into the office, which will be staffed five days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through October, with slightly reduced fall hours after that.

"What if the chamber does dis-

solve, who is going to answer those questions?" Mrs. Peterson said. "I can't imagine that, in this community."

Chamber Member Fees

The following fee structure is in place for membership in the Chamber of Commerce:

General Business, \$265 plus \$11 per employee. Professional, \$265. Attraction, \$295. Industrial, \$350. Lodging with 10 units or fewer, \$240 plus \$3 per unit. Lodging with more than 10 units,

\$310 plus \$3 per unit. Campground, \$265 plus 50¢ per campsite. Restaurant with liquor, \$310 plus \$1.50 per chair. Restaurant without liquor, \$265 plus \$1.50 per chair. Drive-in Restaurant, \$265 plus \$1.50 per chair/spot. Boat Line, \$310 per boat. Service Club/Nonprofit/Church, \$100.

For businesses that fall into more than one category, such as a restaurant with liquor and hotel on one property, all applicable membership categories will be charged.

MSHP Sites Close for Season

All Mackinac State Historic Parks sites will close for the season Sunday, October 8, except Historic Mill Creek in Mackinaw City, which closed Sunday, September 24.

Historic Mill Creek closed early for construction work to replace support timbers on a water-powered sawmill before

cold weather intervenes. The timbers, which were embedded in Mill Creek 22 years ago to hold up the sawmill, are rotting from exposure to water and will be replaced by metal supports encased in wood. Historic Mill Creek will reopen to the public in May 2007.

All sites will re-open in early May 2007.

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