

# City To Install Banners, Lights To Mark Bridge Anniversary This Summer

By Karen Gould

Banners recognizing the 50th birthday of the Mackinac Bridge will line State Street and trees will be strung with red, white, and blue lights in honor of the bridge, marking the celebration that will take place in St. Ignace July 27 and July 28.

The Mackinac Bridge Authority's official anniversary banners will fly from the city's 48 light poles throughout the summer and tree lights will add a patriotic flair to the event, decided by Downtown Development Authority (DDA) during its Friday, March 9, meeting.

The board approved funds up to \$5,000 to purchase two-sided, 28-inch by 56-inch signs and approximately \$1,000 for the colored

lights, while deciding to keep its traditional banners and white tree lights boxed up this year.

"I think this is something very good that we can do to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our bridge in our community," said Deb Evashevski, DDA director.

The anniversary logo design appeared in the November 2, 2006, issue of *The St. Ignace News*.

The board discussed selling the commemorative banners at the end of the season, but reached no decision on the matter before moving on to other business.

Making Chief Wawatam Park handicap accessible, including pic-

nic tables and play areas, could provide more funding for the park through partnership grants from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and W.K. Kellogg Foundation, said Mrs. Evashevski, who is looking into the requirements. The grant would cover needed match funds totaling \$38,000.

Mrs. Evashevski urged the city, as she has in previous meetings, to explore getting the Chief Wawatam railroad ferry track elevator listed as a Michigan Historic Landmark, which could make them eligible for state restoration funds.

The rotting elevator towers have received some work, Mayor Paul Grondin said, but further improvements are a financial concern for the city.

The DDA has been found financially healthy by auditors, who recently completed an evaluation, Mrs. Evashevski said. She is awaiting a final written report.

The board also approved \$500 to support Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME). The not-for-profit agency uses grants and donations to construct single-family residences. The DDA's contribution will be used for the HOME Show scheduled for April 20 and

April 21 at Little Bear East Arena and Convention Center.

The DDA would like to purchase bleachers to be used for Bayside Live and other summer events. At the board's direction, Mrs. Evashevski will look for competitive pricing. She estimated the cost would be approximately \$3,000 for a five-tier aluminum frame bleacher that would seat 45 people.

Now, city crews move bleachers each week to the marina from the St. Ignace ball field for Bayside Live concerts, and scheduling conflicts sometimes arise.

The board received an update on the new informational signs being planned to direct downtown visitors around town. Signs are hoped to be in place by mid-June. Mrs. Evashevski is working with Sam Staffan of Mackinaw Art and Sign in Mackinaw City and estimates each of the six signs will cost \$1,000.

The signs will be changeable and contain a map of the downtown, planned events, a list of

downtown businesses, and museum information.

"My main concern is to try to keep traffic flowing," she told the board.

Restoration work at the Museum of Ojibwa Culture building will not be as extensive as previously reported, the DDA learned.

The board approved Shirley Sorrels, director of the Museum of Ojibwa Culture, to apply for a grant from the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians to cover estimated costs of more than \$30,000 to paint the outside of the museum and add wall insulation.

The building does not have to be raised and a foundation added, as previously believed, said Mrs. Sorrels. The building sits on a concrete foundation and not on the ground, wrote Susan Edwards, an engineer with R.S. Scott Associates, Inc. of St. Ignace, in a report on the structure.

The next DDA meeting is scheduled for Friday, April 13, at 8 a.m. in council chambers on the second floor of City Hall.

## Island Projects Set for Spring Proposals Brought to Mackinac Planners

By Karen Gould

With the tourist season two months away and the weather warming, the outdoor construction season has begun on Mackinac Island, with hotel projects and retail renovation proposals the focus of the Planning Commission meeting Tuesday, March 13.

A remodeling project at LaChance Cottage on Main Street includes aligning the depth of the outside decks to provide a more consistent appearance. An outside brick fireplace chimney is planned to be removed and a fourth dormer will be added to the building's east side, once the project passes architectural review and receives the approval of the Planning Commission.

Owner Michael Bacon has sent architectural plans to the city's architect, Rick Neumann of Petoskey, and the commission now awaits a final report.

Inside remodeling already is underway at the 19-room hotel, which was purchased by Dr. Bacon last fall from Frank Blowski. Private baths are being added for each room at the hotel, which previously offered shared bathrooms.

A seasonal awning covering the outdoor dining deck on the water side of the Chippewa Hotel will be replaced with a permanent roof if the project passes architectural review. Plans propose constructing a roof with asphalt tiles, which are consistent with roofs in the area.

Plans also call for the hotel's fire suppression sprinkler system to extend to the deck area.

The Jaunting Cart, a 1970s built retail shop and housing unit on Market Street, needs structural repairs and commissioners sent the project to architectural review. Frank Nephew owns the building and Armin Porter, acting as his agent, attended the meeting.

"The overhang that sticks out about two feet has caused structural problems with water getting behind it," said Mr. Porter.

Plans call for the overhang to be eliminated.

Exterior renovations to the front of Doud's Mercantile, which will be operated by Andrew Doud when it reopens by May, would be an improvement, said the architectural review report from Mr. Neuman. The project calls for relocating the existing double-door entrance from the southeast corner to the center of the building. The commission approved placing Mr. Neuman's report on file.

Mr. Doud also sought an amendment to his barn zoning application to change roof tiles from cedar to asphalt, which was approved by commissioners. Mr. Doud is building a horse barn on his lot in Harrisonville.

Dr. Bacon asked to increase an existing second-floor deck at his Summer House Suites home to 12 feet wide by more than seven feet deep. The project was tabled pending the architectural review.

The commission decided to review the zoning application form and bring any suggested changes to the next meeting. Members already noted they would like the form to provide

## Marge Bekins Preserves Basket Art Tradition

By Paul Gingras

Growing tall in the forests of the north is a tree with rough, gray bark and broad, green leaves, and to most, it is simply one of Michigan's many natural features. But when St. Ignace resident Marge Bekins, a master basket maker, looks at a Black Ash tree, she sees deeply into her cultural heritage, which she has been learning, layer by layer, just as she peels back layers of inner bark to practice her craft. Ms. Bekins helps maintain a traditional form of art wrought by the Chippewa for centuries, and for her, the Black Ash stands at the center of her spirituality, a force that drives her to weave and compels her to teach.

In 1996, expert Chippewa basket maker Charlie Shedawin of Sault Ste. Marie handed Ms. Bekins an eagle feather, declared her an official Black Ash basket maker, and charged her with the responsibility of teaching others their rapidly disappearing craft. One of few remaining teachers in the area, she now practices constantly, producing baskets of all sizes, shapes, and uses.

Both durable and attractive, Black Ash baskets have been created by the Chippewa for centuries. At one time, they were an important part of daily survival, used by members to gather food and carry materials from camp to camp. Later, Black Ash baskets were also created for sale and trade.

Born in St. Ignace in 1959, Ms. Bekins moved with her parents to Brighton in 1967. Throughout her childhood, she made frequent trips to the Straits of Mackinac with her father, Joseph Andress, a man of Chippewa, Ottawa, and French descent, and her mother, Gerraine Andress, of Finnish background.

When she was about 10 years old, while window shopping in St. Ignace, she noticed native-made Black Ash baskets.

"They were beautiful," she said, "and I thought to myself, 'I'm going to make them one day.'"

It was a dream that persisted



Marge Bekins weaving a Black Ash basket.

through 1996, when she met St. Ignace resident Molly Perry, now Molly Paquin, who was director of the Marquette Mission Park and Museum of Ojibwa Culture. Mrs. Paquin put her in contact with Mr. Shedawin, who took her under his wing.

As teacher and student, they gathered Black Ash material and made baskets all summer, submitted their work to Michigan State University, and won a grant that enabled them to enter into an intensive mentor/apprentice relationship for two years.

Her path to expertise had begun, but "it takes about 10 years to become a master of this craft," Ms. Bekins said.

She now creates baskets that vary from the size of a large laundry hamper to delicate containers smaller than a shot glass. Black Ash baskets are spread throughout her home on Prospect Street, many of which have thin, curled, dyed strips of wood woven into the frames.

To gather material for a basket, Ms. Bekins enters a forest

and prays in appreciation of the Black Ash before cutting it down. She then removes a portion of the trunk a few feet above the base. It's best to do this when the sap is running, she said, preferably in spring or autumn.

Beneath the rugged exterior is strong, thin, tan, inner bark. She peels it back to create strips of varying thickness, which she uses for handles, rims, frames, and intricate decorations.

To the Chippewa, as well as other tribes, the Black Ash tree is an important spiritual icon. The ash-basket craft was handed down by a spiritual leader known as Black Elk, who explained how to make Black Ash baskets. Legend has it that when he passed away, his ashes were buried, and a Black Ash tree emerged from the burial site, yielding material for a new craft people then used for survival.

The Black Ash is sacred, Ms. Bekins said, and master basket makers consider themselves

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## Skate Park Upgrade Eyed by Recreation Dept.

By Ryan Schlehuder

The St. Ignace Recreation Advisory Committee met Wednesday, March 14, and discussed several programs needing improvement, such as the disc golf course at Silver Mountain, the city's skate park, spring and fall use of the ice rink, and the city's summer soccer program.

### Skate Park Appeal

C.J. Campbell, an avid skateboarder from St. Ignace, approached the committee to seek support in improving the city's skate park. The city equipment skateboarders use is dilapidated and needs to be upgraded, he said.

Mr. Campbell explained that there is a definite need for a better skate park because it provides a recreational area for youth who are not involved in organized sports, such as basketball, football, and baseball.

The skate park is at a paved area across Marquette Street from Little Bear East.

The equipment, which skateboarders use to slide across, jump over, and perform creative tricks, was left outside throughout the winter. Some of it was accidentally damaged by snowplows.

"It is the only place we can go to skate where we won't get in trou-

ble," said Mr. Campbell about the city's skate park. "We get into trouble if we skate anywhere else."

Skateboarders have been warned to stay away from skating near the marina, City Manager Eric Dodson informed the board. Skateboarding is prohibited on city sidewalks and streets through downtown, according to the St. Ignace Police Department.

Mr. Campbell and about 20 other skaters raised \$800 so far to help the city purchase new equipment. Mr. Campbell said he will provide the city with prices and a list of equipment the local skaters would like to see at the skate park.

"I'm not a skateboard enthusiast, but I like his idea," said Mayor Paul Grondin. "We do ball programs and this is as much of a legitimate sport as any that we support. I think they deserve our attention."

"I like his enthusiasm," said committee member Emily Fullerton.

Erica Cena, coordinator for city recreation programs, said the Tony Hawk Foundation offers a \$10,000 grant to low income communities that may help Mr. Campbell's cause. Committee Chairman Don Gustafson said the committee will have to look into whether St. Ignace or the skateboarding group qualifies

as "low income."

### Disc Golf Course To Open Soon

Steve "Frenchy" DuFresne, coordinator of the disc golf course at Silver Mountain, said he is preparing to open the course soon. He will start by putting up course signs in a couple of weeks.

Mr. DuFresne told the board he would like to clear some trees along the course near US-2 for better visibility for players, and to clear away poison ivy, which was a major problem last summer.

"We probably had 200 to 300 people play there last year," said Mr. DuFresne, "and most of them were from out of town. It's one of the nicest courses in the state."

Miss Cena agreed.

"My friends from down state came up to play, and they said our course is much better than any down state because it's more challenging," she said.

### Gymnasium Proposed at the Ice Rink

The ice from the Little Bear East hockey rink was removed Monday, March 19.

Now that the rink will be open for use, Marianne Huskey, who chairs the committee's brainstorming group for Little Bear East programs, hopes to establish an open

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## More Signs May Be Allowed Under Revised City Ordinance

By Ryan Schlehuder

An ad hoc sign committee has agreed on revisions to the St. Ignace sign ordinance and has sent them to the city council, which must vote to make the changes law.

One of the more notable changes made during the committee meeting Thursday, March 15, is to allow businesses to display up to two wall signs (with a city permit), two signs that cannot exceed six square feet each, one projecting sign, and three banners.

Businesses will still be limited to up to 25 percent of an exterior wall for signage.

Banners cannot exceed 32 square feet, they must be kept in "good repair," and can be displayed for no more than 90 days.

Currently, businesses are allowed only one wall sign and one projecting sign, and banners are not defined in the ordinance, leading to differences in interpretation between the Planning Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), which has been debating the issue.

The Planning Commission argued that because banners were not specifically mentioned in the ordinance, they were allowed. The ZBA believed the opposite.

The ad hoc committee was formed by Mayor Paul Grondin to put to rest arguments between the Planning Commission, which began revisions to the sign ordinance last year, the city's Downtown Development Authority (DDA), the city's building inspector, and Zoning Board of Appeals. The committee has sought to clarify language in the revisions to allow for easier enforcement of the ordinance.

The committee consisted of Mayor Grondin, DDA Director Deb Evashevski, City Manager Eric Dodson, Building Inspector Paul Sved, Planning Commissioner Fred Strich, Councilmen Don Gustafson and Tom Della-Moretta, ZBA member Jake Tamlyn, and Prentiss "Moie" Brown Jr., the city's attorney.

Other significant changes proposed to city council include:

- The statement, "It is the intent of this chapter to prohibit any signs not permitted under this ordinance," was moved under the title

and purpose section of the ordinance from the non-conforming signs section. The statement basically means that if there is no mention of a particular sign, then it is not allowed.

- People can display political signs for three months (changed from six months) in advance of a scheduled election. The signs are required to be taken down no more than 10 days after the election.

- Appeal processes regarding off-premises or billboard signs will now follow the same procedure as ZBA appeals. Appeals will still go through the Planning Commission, but now applicants will have to notify all neighbors within 300 feet of the targeted site, just as the ZBA requires for its appeals process. Currently, the Planning Commission made the judgment call as to who should be notified, said DDA Director Deb Evashevski.

- The definition for a directory sign will be "a sign whose content indicates names and locations of multiple (changed from "at least five") businesses, as well as the location of related customer convenience services and facilities."

- Tent (sandwich board) signs cannot exceed 16 square feet per side, regulating each side of a two-sided sign. Initial revisions stated that tent signs could not exceed 32 square feet and did not specify sides.

- Overhanging signs are allowed a maximum of five feet projecting, 20 square feet in area, and a minimum height of 10 feet. Initial revisions had a maximum of eight feet projecting and did not specify how big overhanging signs could be in total square footage.

Defining what a mural is and how it differs from a commercial sign was the only item left unfinished after the two-hour meeting March 15, however, Mayor Grondin asked Mr. Brown to create a definition of a mural that would be satisfactory in a court of law.

The committee believes a mural should be described as a wordless painting or artwork on a building or framework. If that artwork is accompanied with any wording, it is considered a commercial sign.

## Main Street Projects Taking Shape



Main Street Mackinac Island is beginning to take shape in March in preparation for the tourist season, just two months away. Facade work continues on Victor Callewaert's new building (second from left), planned to house a Starbucks coffee shop. The three-story building replaced a two-story, 120-year-old downtown building that was demolished last fall following structural failure.

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