

# Prentiss Brown Jr. Recalls Half Century of Progress in St. Ignace

## City Attorney Notes Milestones During 50 Years of Service

**By Ellen Paquin**  
From his vantage point of 50 years as the city's attorney, Prentiss M. "Moie" Brown Jr. looks upon the past half century as one of great progress for St. Ignace. While tracing the population's ebb and flow with the rise and fall of the railroads and the building of the Mackinac Bridge, he points to many improvements that have made life better for residents here over those years, including the planning of the bridge, creation of the county hospital, city acquisition of railroad properties in the early 1980s, and water and sewer

upgrades.  
"St. Ignace years ago was a substantial lake port, and with the state ferries and rail ferries here employing probably 600 people, it was the center, an economic stronghold," Mr. Brown said of the town in the early 1950s.  
It was in this atmosphere that he began his working life following two years of World War II service in the U.S. Navy Air Corps, an education at Newberry College, University of South Carolina, and Albion College, and law school at University of Michigan, from which he was graduated in 1951. The sixth of seven children of Senator Prentiss Marsh Brown and Marion Elizabeth Walker, he is a lifelong St. Ignace resident, like his parents before him.  
His father was influential in pushing for construction of the Mackinac Bridge.  
"Things got real busy in the early '50s, when the bridge was anticipated," Mr. Brown recalls. "The planning of the bridge was very important here. It excited a lot of people, although some said we didn't need it. It is interesting to note that, in the early '40s, the highway department saw a need for quicker transport between Mac-



Prentiss M. "Moie" Brown Jr. in his St. Ignace law office.

kinaw City and St. Ignace and built the causeway on the south side of St. Ignace into the Straits, and anticipated building a dock there. But the war frustrated that construction. That causeway was later developed as almost one mile of the causeway for the bridge.  
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from school. It proved to be quite a boon for the city of St. Ignace, adding 300 or 400 bridge employees, so that there was a boom in housing. The city saw a remarkable increase in populations of the school, churches, civic functions, and the stores. Not only did employees and their visitors fill the restaurants and schools, they eventually sparked the building of the new high school in the 1950s."  
Mr. Brown recalled a big parade May 8, 1954, when the town celebrated the beginning of the bridge

construction project. Despite the spring date, a light snow fell on the festivities.  
When the state ferries closed down, Mr. Brown worked with his father and Governor G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams to arrange jobs in the state highway department for local ferry employees.  
St. Ignace lost some families then, and again in the early 1960s when the rail business lagged.  
"It was not a good thing as far as the city was concerned, and by the '80s we had lost all of the rail workers."  
In 1968, Mr. Brown, a supporter of city improvement projects, was chosen as the third recipient of the St. Ignace Citizen of the Year Award. He was cited for his work in the American Legion, Kiwanis Club, hospital board, Chamber of Commerce board, St. Ignace Area Development Corporation, golf association, swimming pool committee, Father Marquette Pageant Association, and the Methodist church.  
The late 1960s saw a change in government, with St. Ignace bringing in professional city managers,

Mr. Brown said, and around the same time, work began to upgrade water and sewer systems from old 1930s standards.  
"That was a big improvement in the community," he said. "We bought the water system from Edison Soo, which had taken it over from the teens. It became a public utility and eligible for federal and state funding." The system was upgraded again in the 1980s and 1990s and expanded to include outlying areas in St. Ignace Township and Moran Township, areas for future growth. The downtown street-scape design and boardwalk installation began then, as well.  
"Another big improvement was after the railroad left in the

early '80s, and the city bought the railroad yards and properties for \$185,000," Mr. Brown said. The old railroad roundhouse was located where the lumberyard now stands downtown. Engines came in on the south side of Marquette Street, and box cars were stored where Little Bear East Arena is now. The purchase gave residents

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## Students Take Plea to Lansing

**By Amy Polk**  
Les Cheneaux Community Schools will take at least two bus loads of students and community members to the steps of the state capitol Wednesday, May 16, where they will read essays about public education.

The trip will be an exercise in the democratic process, said Elementary School Principal Eric Cardwell, and a chance to lobby lawmakers for school funding reform.

Driven by statewide school funding deficits, Mr. Cardwell said the district wants to be active in reform, rather than simply complain. The Les Cheneaux district's own budget deficit is expected to top \$200,000 next year.

"We can't just sit back and do nothing," Mr. Cardwell said. "We should try to do something. We're looking to put faces on the decisions Lansing makes, so they know it's not all about money."

He is inviting other Eastern Upper Peninsula school districts to join what he calls an educational rally.

"I'm excited about it because it's participation in the democratic process, and it should be empowering for the students," he said. "These kids don't have the opportunity to vote, and this gives them the opportunity to be heard. I think it could be a powerful thing to drive 250 miles, one-way, to Lansing for this."

The Les Cheneaux district trip will be funded by private donations from the community. It will include a tour of the state capitol, meetings with State Representative Gary McDowell and Senator Jason Allen, a meeting with a representative of the Michigan Department of Education, and reading student essays about the meaning of education on the capitol steps. So far one bus driver and one retired teacher have donated their time to the trip.

The group will leave Cedarville at 6 a.m. and return by 8 p.m. Wednesday evening.

The trip is voluntary, and the first seats on the bus will go to fourth and fifth grade students, because of the relevance of the trip to Michigan history and social studies lessons in those grades. If there is room, the rally will be open to the rest of the elementary and to middle and high school social studies and history classes.

One budget concession already made at Les Cheneaux Schools is to eliminate all non-essential field trips like this one from the general fund budget in 2006. Another, decided on this year, was to move the sixth grade back to the elementary school, where Mr. Cardwell will return to classroom teaching. Part of his salary will be reduced to reflect the lower teacher's salary, saving the district from hiring an additional teacher.

Mr. Cardwell said the idea for the trip came from school and community discussions about petitioning lawmakers to improve school funding. He said it is the first time an Eastern Upper Peninsula school has rallied at the state capitol building.

"We're building citizens, and developing critical and essay-writing skills, and it's being done in a meaningful way," Mr. Cardwell said. "Kids tend to learn by participation."



## St. Ignace Road Work Continues

Milling the old road surface on I-75 Business Loop in St. Ignace began Tuesday, May 1. The 7.1 miles of resurfacing work, a Michigan Department of Transportation project, will continue on State Street (Business Loop) from Marquette Street to Antoine Street and is expected to be completed by June 7.

## Gaylord Post Office Hires 20, No Longer Slated for Closure

Twenty new career employees will be hired at the Gaylord post office, an indication that the U.S. Postal Service no longer intends to close the facility. The Gaylord post office processes all mail from the 497 zip codes, between Grayling and Sault Ste. Marie, Alpena, and Charlevoix.

Last year, following an internal study, the Postal Service considered removing mail processing from the Gaylord facility, leading the postal union to protest. Had the Gaylord post office closed, mail would have been rerouted to Traverse City or farther down state, which could delay mail delivery for two or three days, said John Marcotte, American Postal Worker Union Local 4881 president.

Mr. Marcotte has now reached an agreement with the Postal Service to hire 20 new career employees at Gaylord, the first time, he said, a career employee has been hired at Gaylord since 2001.

"The addition of 20 career employees at the Gaylord post office will all but assure the end of the [internal] study and its recommendation to remove mail processing from the Gaylord facility," said Mr. Marcotte.

The Gaylord post office has been a leader in productivity and efficiency in the Great Lakes area, even while using outdated equipment, Mr. Marcotte contends in an April 30 press release.

## Postal Carriers To Collect Food

Postal carriers will collect non-perishable food Saturday, May 12, to help families in need. Donations can be left at mailboxes on that day, where they will be collected and delivered to area food pantries.

Canned and boxed foods will be accepted, but not glass containers. The Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive is sponsored by the National Association of Letter Carriers and the U.S. Postal Service.

## County Sets June 7 Date for 2nd Road Commission Public Hearing

Mackinac County Board of Commissioners will hold a second public hearing regarding possible expansion of the Road Commission Thursday, June 7, at 3:30 p.m. in the third floor court room at the county courthouse in St. Ignace.

Commissioners called the second hearing to allow those who could not attend the April 19 hearing a second opportunity to voice their opinions.

A new state law gives county commissioners the option to increase the three-member road commission to five members.

## Across the EUP, the Frogs Are Singing... Amphibian Calls Offer Critical Scientific Data

**By Paul Gingras**  
To most, a misty, drizzly evening is a sign to stay home, but for frog and toad enthusiasts, it's prime time to seek area wetlands, where the trills, peeps, and ribbits of amphibians reflect the health of ecosystems in the Eastern Upper Peninsula. For both fun and science, people monitor the vast swamps and wetlands, some volunteering information for Canadian or American frog and toad surveys. They note the presence, or absence, of the area's hopping amphibians in a unique form of outdoor recreation that offers a chance for logical analysis, guaranteed natural awareness, and at times, even moments of serenity.

Three or four years ago, Cedarville resident Christine Perrault stood still on Beavertail Point, east of town, listening to the raucous peeps of spring peepers and the duck-like warble of wood frogs, two species now singing in the area. Above her were shooting stars, surrounding her were blinking fireflies, and before she left, a fox trotted past.  
"All of the nights are fun," she explained, part of the reason she has collected data for the past seven years, heading for the wetlands during the first weeks of May, June, and July.  
Northern spring peepers are out now, she said, and although they are hard to see, they are easy to hear. Throughout the EUP, the males are filling the air with high-pitched peeps, calling females to breeding areas ranging from cedar swamps to open wetlands that sway with cattails, where pickerel weed and arrowhead leaves float on the water's surface.  
As adults, the tiny brown or tan tree frogs range from 0.75 to 1.38 inches long, and although glimpsing the wary ventriloquists can be a challenge, a patient observer may see an X, or part of an X, on the peeper's back.  
Like many frog surveyors, Ms. Perrault visits the same stopping points, between Cedarville and DeTour, year after year. In some spots, she easily counts the number of peepers. In others, they are more numerous and their calls overlap, and some areas host a cacophony of voices too loud to differentiate, she said.  
When she first learned about spring peepers, she thought, "It's the sound I always heard as a kid!"  
The call of the northern spring peeper is one most likely to be recognized by area residents.  
The wood frog is another common species calling from the EUP's forests and fens this spring. People sometimes confuse its voice with a bird, Ms. Perrault said. To some, it sounds like a duck quacking in the distance, while she describes it as a "subtle chuckle." Now floating on the sur-

faces of area wetlands, the wood frog appears gray, brown, reddish brown, or tan, with an unmistakable, dark mask over each eye.  
Mike Vaal, also of Cedarville, said the wood frog is much easier to count than the spring peeper. It

boots, mosquito repellent, and patience, he contributed to frog and toad surveys from 1999 to 2003.

Mr. Vaal said the calls of wood frogs and spring peepers are unusually abundant this year,



The wood frog is being monitored by local volunteers for state and multi-national frog and toad surveys. The frog has the ability to freeze and survive, allowing it to live farther north than any other amphibian in the world.



The northern spring peeper is the most abundant frog calling in the area. (Photographs courtesy of Bird Studies Canada)

is well into its breeding season when the calls of peepers overcome its intermittent warble.

The wood frog emerges and begins calling for a mate even when ice remains on ponds and rivers, said James H. Harding, a frog expert from Michigan State University. In the EUP, the wood frog is well within its range-limit. No other amphibian in the world can live as far north as the wood frog. The tiny creatures can literally freeze during the winter, thaw, and sing again in the spring, Mr. Harding said.

Birds and flowers originally drew Mr. Vaal to EUP wetlands, where he found himself captivated by frog calls. Armed with plastic

which he finds encouraging. They began calling early, sometime around mid-April.

The calls of peepers and wood frogs will fade with the spring, Ms. Perrault said. Even now, they are being joined by the western chorus frog, a creature with a voice like a thumbnail drawn across the teeth of a comb. By June, most likely, this will be replaced by the voice of the green frog, which lives in almost any body of water, including ponds, rivers, and ditches. Its voice is like the plucking of a loose banjo string. Long after the spring breeding season ends and other species have gone silent, gray tree frogs will continue to call from the

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