

County Commission Gives \$10,000 to Clark Township Park Development

By Karen Gould

Clark Township Recreation Park has received \$10,000 from the Mackinac County Board of Commissioners, who continue to dole out funds for economic development projects. The commission grant meets an anonymous donor's pledge to match up to \$10,000 for the township project.

Commissioners agreed to contribute to the park at their Thursday, May 10 meeting, pending the signing of a contract by the township recreation committee.

In the last year, commissioners have awarded \$45,000 for economic development in the county. The process bypasses the county

Economic Development Corporation, from which the commission has pulled most of its financial support in 2005, citing lack of progress being made by the group.

In 2006, commissioners gave \$10,000 to establish a vintage snowmobile museum in Naubinway, \$5,000 to the St. Ignace lighthouse project, and \$10,000 to the proposed North Huron Scenic Pathway fund. This March, the St. Ignace Downtown Development Authority received \$10,000 from the commission to further develop a park on the old railroad dock, where the lighthouse stands.

In March, commissioners decided to seek an economic development director for the county, although discussions on the new position have stalled.

The Clark Township Recreation Park is being constructed behind the Clark Township Hall on Blind Line Road in Cedarville. It will include a pavilion, which is under construction, two ball diamonds, basketball, tennis, and volleyball courts, and an ice skating rink.

The county contribution will be used for digging a well, adding electrical service, and preparing the site for irrigation, said Michelle Walk, Clark Township Recreation Committee member.

Recreation Committee Chairman Darrell Hill said the park would give residents a place to meet and a reason for tourists to come back to Cedarville.

Ms. Walk agreed.

"It will provide additional income to businesses, because we will have the space to do events," said Ms. Walk, "and it will enhance the community as a whole from a tourism perspective."

Questions asked by County Commission Chair Dawn Nelson about granting funds remained unanswered and no discussion was undertaken by the board when she reminded commissioners they have not set any guidelines or rules

for the grants they have been giving various projects.

"How often are we going to do this per unit?" she asked. "Are we going to have a cap on what we're

going to match?"

The next regular meeting of the county commission is Thursday, May 24, at 3:30 p.m. in the County Courthouse annex building.

St. Ignace Library Raises \$8,000 Toward \$10,000 Goal

The St. Ignace Public Library has raised \$8,000 toward its goal of \$10,000 to activate a new library endowment fund.

The St. Ignace Public Library, Friends of the Library, and the St. Ignace Community Foundation have been working together to establish the fund, which will eventually be used to expand library programs, maintain Community Room furnishings, and add to technology offered at the library.

Since the fundraising effort was launched in February, every \$1 donation to the library, up to \$1,000, actually put \$3 into the library's piggybank, thanks to matching contributions from Friends of the Library and an Ernie Harwell Libraries Endowment Fund grant.

The library board had to raise \$5,000 locally to launch its endowment fund, and is still seeking donations toward the

\$10,000 needed to activate the fund.

An endowment is an invested fund that uses only the income from the investment to pay for projects. The original donations remain intact, continuing to earn investment dollars for future projects.

Donations to the endowment are tax deductible.

Donations can be made at the library, or to any Friends of the Library member. Checks can be made payable to St. Ignace Area Community Foundation, SIPL Endowment Fund, and sent to P.O. Box 151, St. Ignace Michigan 49781.

The endowment will be guided by the library's seven-member board of directors. Currently serving are Linda Monville, Paul Grondin, Renee Vonderwerth, Jean Nitz, Hart Plumstead, Margaret Peacock, and Mary Maurer.

Clark Planners OK Cell Phone Tower Project

By Amy Polk

Clark Township will have better wireless telephone reception and may soon have high speed Internet service with the installation of a new tower between State Avenue and M-134 in Cedarville.

The Clark Township Planning Commission Tuesday, May 8, unanimously approved a special land use permit application from Cellere, a Traverse-city based company that helps implement wireless technology by filing permits and paperwork for companies that want to expand wireless services. The company applied for the permit on behalf of Florida-based SBA Communications, which will build the 290-foot guyed tower, pending a few final hurdles, said Papillon Erreca, a Cellere agent.

Local land use approval is one of the necessary components in the four-month tower approval process, Mr. Erreca said.

"We're nearing the tail end of that now," he said.

The firm is awaiting the June 15 delivery of an Environmental Impact Study required by the National Environmental Policy Agency (NEPA), and SBA plans construction in June. The proposed tower has met safety requirements and has a 100% fall zone, Mr. Erreca said, meaning that if it falls in any direction from its base, it will not hit any structures below.

Construction will take 30 days, and SBA expects completion in July.

The first tenant on the tower will be Dobson Communications Corporation of Minnesota, the parent company of Cellular One. Customers of that wireless telephone company will get better reception in the Clark Township area when the company's coverage area is expanded. Mr. Erreca said the new service area will have about a 5.5-mile radius broadcast range, bridging the space between a tower near DeTour Village and another tower near Rockview Road. Most of the Les Cheneaux Islands fall within the tower's broadcast range. Mr. Erreca estimated the wireless Internet range will be approximately three miles from the tower.

Since the tower is not owned by any service provider, other companies can rent space. Up to five tenants can use the tower, Mr. Erreca said, and Cellular One will have the top space at 290 feet.

Lighthouse Computers has applied to mount its broadcast equipment on the tower at 250 feet, and plans to be the first high-speed Internet service provider in Clark Township. CS Connect, a high-speed wireless Internet start-up operated by Dan Burrows of Cedarville, also may use the tower as an anchor site. Mr. Burrows has also been discussing the possibility of building smaller satellite towers around the Eastern Upper Peninsula.

Clark Township can use the tower for \$1 a year to broadcast emergency services or 9-1-1 radio transmissions, Mr. Erreca said.

"I think [high speed Internet] is something this area has been eagerly anticipating," said Planning Commission Chair Steve Honnila.

Both Dobson and Lighthouse want to mount their equipment on the tower during construction next month to expedite their service expansion in the area.

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White Robin Sighted at Mackinaw City

Spring really is with us. Walking in the woods yesterday, I saw that the hepatica (liverleaf or May flower, as they're sometimes called around here) are blooming, and the trillium are up, although not blooming. Many migrating birds have begun to show up, either to visit or just pass through. One bird often referred to as a harbinger of spring is the American robin, which is interesting because through much of its United States range, it's a year-around resident. These songbirds of the thrush family (*turdidae*) are noted for their bold song, which is a gurgling, leisurely "sing-song cheerily cheer-up cheerio," which is often repeated. Because these birds consume earthworms, snails, and insects as a large portion of their diet (along with fruit), they're particularly susceptible to insecticide poisoning. Their decline in numbers in the 1960s, owing to the spraying of DDT in the 1950s, was instrumental in arousing concern over a potential "silent spring."

In addition to their song, American robins are probably best recognized by their bright, brick red breast, which contrasts nicely with their dark brownish gray back and wings, and their blackish head and tail. Once in a while, however, an American robin of another color appears. Recently, I had a call from Betty Vieau, who lives in Mackinaw City but works at our Tourism Bureau. In her yard, she observed a predominantly white, mid-sized bird with slightly rosy color on its breast. After talking with her neighbors, she found out that the bird had first been seen by Nelson LaPointe, also of Mackinaw City. Her 16-year-old grandson, Tim, took a picture of the bird and eventually Jeff Dykehouse, the naturalist of the Mackinac State Historic Parks, saw the photograph and identified it as a partial albino.

Albinism is a condition in which an individual cannot produce a pigment known as melanin, and it can happen in birds, animals, and humans. It's a genetic condition in which an individual inherits two recessive genes. It doesn't matter what other genes an individual inherits for eye, hair, skin, or feather color; if the individual has those two recessive genes, no color will be expressed. This is what has been called an "inborn error of metabolism." In the case of albinism, an enzyme is missing in the system, the function of which is to convert tyrosine to melanin.

Totally albino birds not only have all white plumage, but they also have pink eyes, pale legs, and bills. It is twice as likely for a bird to be a "partial albino" than it is to be a total albino. Partial albino birds often have normal eye, bill, and leg color, and may well have patches of colored feathers. Partial albinism is sometimes caused by the failure of pigment to reach certain feathers as they're growing, perhaps caused by a blocked gland. Shock, unbalanced diet, disease, or injury may also cause partial albinism. Not all bird species have the same chance of having an albino individual. In a British article, "Albinism in Birds" (*Bird Watch Ireland*), researchers stat-

ed that 160 species of British birds have been recorded to show albinism, either total or partial. Six families of birds seem the most susceptible to albinism, accounting for two-thirds of the



This predominantly white robin has been seen by Mackinaw City residents. (Photographs by Tim Vieau)



albino birds recorded. These families include: thrushes (29%), crows (11%), swallows/martins (7%), sparrows (7%), starlings (7%), and finches (6%).

In North America, it has been reported that more than 300 species of birds exhibit at least partial albinism, although the frequency is still rather low; less than 0.1 percent of all birds. In the U.S., American robins and house sparrows have most commonly been reported as having partially albino individuals, although I've also seen articles about albino hawks and cardinals. It's interesting to note that bird species with red pigmentation often have that red pigmentation partially retained in the albino form, as is the case in the partial albino American robin that Betty found.

Partial albinos in the wild often have a difficult time surviving, and total albinos have difficulty in particular. Total albinos often have poorer eyesight and weak, brittle feathers that break more easily than normal birds. Because of the white coloring, they're sometimes not recognized, and ostracized, by their own species. If this happens, they're much more susceptible to predation, not only because of their white color, which makes them more visible against the greens and browns of the forest and fields, but because they're alone. They are therefore in more danger. Because of their color-

ing, they may also not be recognized as acceptable mates. This is not always the case, however. Betty said the robin she saw was hanging around with a couple of other robins who seemed to be



keeping an eye out for him. In one report, a partial albino cardinal, who seemed to be associating well with other birds of his species, apparently had a mate. It was postulated that perhaps this was because he had the reddish tinges in the right places.

A number of other plumage abnormalities occur less frequently than albinism. Melanism is one of these. This is a condition in which a bird has an abnormal amount of dark pigmentation. In North America, this has been reported to occur in only about 29 species, including buzzards and woodcocks, as well as the most commonly reported melanistic bird, the pheasant. Erythism is a condition in which the bird has an excess of red pigmentation. Xanthochroism is a condition in which darker pigments are lost and there is an abnormal retention of yellow pigments. Some warblers and wagtails have been reported with this color deviation. Leucism is a condition in which birds are abnormally pale or washed out. This color variation is more common than the others, with the exception of albinism.

Trish Martin, a regular columnist for the Mackinac Island Town Crier, is a year-around resident of Mackinac Island, has earned a master's degree in botany from Central Michigan University, and owns Bogan Lane Inn.

Old Cisterns Found Beneath Unused Moran Building Sites

By Paul Gingras

Dangerous, obsolete cisterns continue to be found beneath Moran on M-123, remnants of an earlier era. It was a common practice by business owners years ago to build cisterns to collect water for emergencies or even for normal use, if they could not tap into groundwater, said residents at the Brevort Township Board of Trustees meeting Tuesday, May 1.

Kirk Lipnitz and his son, Jax, found a cistern between the hardware store and the post office Friday, April 27. The cistern was revealed by a hole big enough for Jax to fall into, Mr. Lipnitz told *The St. Ignace News*. He could not determine its depth.

At the meeting, the township board discussed the matter and hired Maverick Construction to fill the cistern, for up to \$250.

Rob Frazier of Maverick was present at the meeting and said he filled more than 10 cistern holes, many near the post office, last fall during demolition of old buildings. During the project, the rear end of a backhoe sank into the ground above a cistern, and he said he is surprised that no other vehicles

have broken through the surface before.

Filling old cisterns has been done in Moran in the past, Trustee Vern Erskine said.

"We thought we had gotten them all when Maverick tore the Bradford building down," said Township Supervisor Ed Serwach. "This one popped up. We are going to have it filled, and we hope there aren't any more."

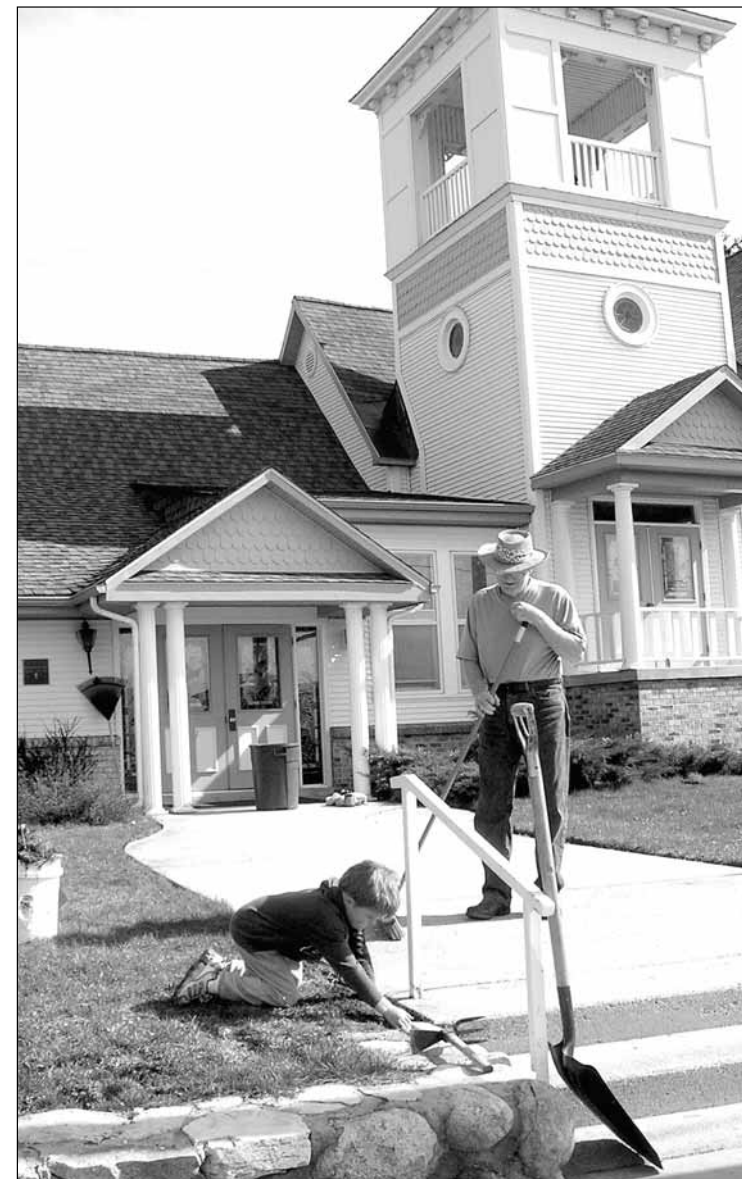
In other business, the board accepted information gathered from its Fire Committee, which was appointed to help plan a new fire barn. The board will decide whether to build a fire hall in early summer, Mr. Serwach said.

The committee has provided rough plans for a simple, 60-foot-by-60-foot building. The most recent plans were provided by DEM Architects of Gaylord, which estimated the cost at \$323,000. Township Fire Chief Mark Peterson said when he sought the estimate from DEM, he had assumed the hall could be built for roughly \$200,000.

The Brevort Township Building

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It's Time for Spring Cleaning



Volunteers of all ages gathered Saturday, May 5, to spruce up the grounds around First Union Church of Cedarville on Hodeck Street. Gordie Burger (left) pulls weeds, while Jim Berryhill rakes in the front yard of the church on a bright spring morning.