

Jobs on Bridge, Island Filmed for Discovery Channel Show

By Karen Gould

Mike Rowe, host of the Discovery Channel television series "Dirty Jobs," spent four days in the Upper Peninsula last week, tackling the challenging maintenance work of the Mackinac Bridge and driving a horse-drawn sloop wagon, considered by some the dirtiest job on Mackinac Island. Area residents and businesses welcomed the television crew with unparalleled hospitality, said show producer Dave Barsky.

Known for showcasing the American work ethic of men and women across the country who perform jobs that few want to do, Mr. Rowe painted bridge suspension cables 250 feet above the Straits,

climbed a main cable to change a decorative bridge light, and crawled inside the base of a bridge tower to remove rust and repaint steel.

On Mackinac Island, he cleaned horse manure from Main Street and drove the horse-drawn sloop wagon of restaurant food waste to the compost site at the Solid Waste Handling Facility.

An air date for the shows filmed here has not yet been scheduled, said Mr. Barsky.

Film crews shot Mr. Rowe's Island adventures Tuesday, May 22, and Wednesday, May 23, they scouted and planned two days of filming on the bridge. The project ended Friday, May 25.

"He really looked nervous," said Bob Sweeney, executive secretary of the Mackinac Bridge Authority

(MBA), of Mr. Rowe moments before he climbed the main cable to change a bridge light.

MBA electrician Glen "Mink" Lewis led Mr. Rowe up one of the bridge's two main cables that sup-

port the four lanes of I-75 between the Upper and Lower Peninsulas. The task was to replace one decorative light that silhouettes the bridge at night.

"The guy was determined," said Mr. Lewis. "The fact that he was nervous and scared didn't stop him."

The 24.5-inch-wide cable is a steep climb to the top of the bridge towers, which stand 252 feet above the Straits.

Two safety lines are worn when climbing, said Mr. Lewis, who instructed Mr. Rowe on procedures before the two headed up the cable. One end of both safety lines is connected to the climber, he said. The other end of one safety line is then

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Secured to the Mackinac Bridge and the spider climber with multiple safety lines, bridge steeple jack Fred Spinella (left) and Mike Rowe prepare for painting suspension cables Friday, May 25. Their work is captured by a Discovery Channel cameraman standing on the bridge deck and a camera crew in a nearby spider climber. (Photograph by Dan Johnson, MBA)

Brevort Twp. Firemen Get New Tanker Truck

By Paul Gingras

Members of the Brevort Township Fire Department assembled Thursday, May 24, to celebrate the purchase of their first new tanker truck in roughly 15 years. The engine on the department's old, makeshift tanker cracked on a run to East Lake about a month ago, leading the township to call invoke the St. Ignace Fire Department's mutual aid agreement. St. Ignace stood by, in case a fire occurred in the municipality before a new tanker could be located.

No fires took place while the department scrambled to find a new tanker.

The old tanker was not worth replacing, Fire Chief Mark Peterson told Township Supervisor Ed Serwach.

Township firefighters have relied on a 1973 former Mackinac County Road Commission truck to haul water. They added a water

tank to the vehicle themselves.

"We had \$1 and a lot of work invested" in the old truck, Chief Peterson said.

The tank on the old truck began to leak, and buying a new motor was not sensible, so firefighters Travis Peterson and Ron Peterka and Chief Peterson located a vehicle for sale on the Internet by the Keavy Fire Department in Kentucky.

Keavy had recently secured a brand new tanker and put its 1987 GMC tanker, complete with a stainless steel tank, up for sale. The vehicle has 39,000 miles on it.

The \$25,000 tanker could have cost the township more than \$100,000 Chief Peterson told *The St. Ignace News*. There were cheaper tankers for sale on the Internet, but nothing with such low mileage and a stainless steel tank.

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Townships Consolidation Bill Withdrawn

Would Have Given Duties to Counties

By Paul Gingras

A bill that would have given counties responsibility for services now provided by townships, such as collecting taxes and assessing property, has been withdrawn by its sponsor before it could be discussed at a scheduled hearing Friday, May 25, by the House Intergovernmental, Urban, and Regional Affairs Committee. It was conceived as a cost-cutting measure.

State Representative Gary McDowell of Rudyard, who convinced the bill's sponsor, Representative Paul Condino, to withdraw it from debate, believes it is possible, although unlikely, that it will be taken up again, he told *The St. Ignace News*.

The Michigan Townships Association (MTA) has concluded that public backlash figured significantly in Rep. Condino's reconsideration of the bill.

The act would affect townships with fewer than 10,000 residents, and townships with 10,000 to 20,000 residents that do not provide 24-hours-a-day fire and police protection, as well as water and sewer services to 50% or more of their populations. This includes 90% of the state's 1,242 townships. Each of Mackinac County's 11 townships have fewer than 10,000 residents. (Mackinac County's total population was 11,943 in the 2000 census.)

Local township boards and MTA did not support the measure. They insist that townships are efficient, adding that while the concept was designed to save money by consolidating services, redirecting township powers to counties would ultimately cost taxpayers more.

Townships say that eliminating local representation would force residents who live far from county seats to travel inconvenient distances to attend meetings, pay taxes, and ask officials about local matters. Further, county officials would seldom be as familiar with outlying areas as members of township boards, said Clark Township Supervisor Linda Hudson.

Mackinac County is 84 miles long, she added, illustrating the inconvenience for some residents.

For counties to absorb the responsibilities of townships, they would need to hire more staff, and new county employees would be paid higher salaries than township officials and would receive health care benefits that members of town-

ship governments do not, Mrs. Hudson added.

According to the bill, counties would charge townships for assessing, tax collection, and election services.

At a meeting in St. Ignace Monday, May 21, Mrs. Hudson and Mr. McDowell discussed the bill. The next day, Mr. McDowell discussed it with Mr. Condino.

Mr. Condino, a Democrat from Oakland County, had assumed consolidating services would lead to

savings. He was not familiar with the practices of township government, Mr. McDowell said, which often include mutual-aid contracts for fire and ambulance services with neighboring communities and low salaries for clerks, treasurers, and supervisors. Mr. McDowell said that by the end of the discussion, Mr. Condino had changed his mind and decided to withdraw the topic from the hearing.

The bill was introduced with good intentions, he added. Owing to

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Road Commission Upholds Choice To Cut Crew Leaders

By Amy Polk

The Mackinac County Road Commission, meeting Monday, May 14, upheld an earlier decision to eliminate two crew leader positions, and maintained it did not violate its contract with employees. All three commissioners voted May 14 to affirm their April 3 actions.

The decision reduced the pay of two employees, Bonnie Tallman, who was crew leader of the East District Garage, and Gary Derusha, former crew leader of the West District Garage. They will remain heavy equipment operators but will no longer receive the extra \$1 per hour wage they received for being crew leaders. Their pay has been reduced by \$2,080 a year, resulting in a \$4,160 savings to the Road Commission.

At the May 14 meeting, Sue Cameron of the American Federation of State and County Municipal Employees filed a grievance on behalf of the employees, questioning whether it was the road commission's right to eliminate the positions and reduce the employees' wages.

It was the only issue discussed at the meeting, and commissioners barred the public at her request, citing "pending litigation" as their reason for doing so. The Open Meetings Act does not allow closing meetings to hear grievances, and pending litigation is a lawsuit that already has been filed, not threatened. So far, neither the union nor the employees have pending litigation against the Road Commission. A grievance hearing must be considered in open session, according to a February 14, 1978, Attorney General opinion. The road commis-

sion's attorney, however, advised the board it could close the meeting for a grievance hearing.

At the commission's Tuesday, May 15, regular meeting, commissioners heard more than one hour of complaints and requests about Mackinac County roads, continued an argument over work commissioned at the Crystal and Brevort Lake roads intersection, signed road work agreements for Hudson and St. Ignace townships, hired Gene Brow and Sons to crush and furnish gravel, reinforced a disparagement clause for road commission employees, and bought a Peterbilt plow truck for \$111,545. The tandem axle truck will replace a plow truck that was wrecked in March, said Road Commission Manager Craig Kelso, and its cost will be covered by insurance. Mr. Kelso is getting bids on the cost of fitting the truck with a winter maintenance package that includes a plow, scraper, and other equipment. Peterbilt estimates it will arrive by the end of June.

Mr. Kelso reported that Mackinac County Road Commission is entitled to \$6,500 in damages from Bacco Construction of Iron Mountain, but no more, according to a recent court decision. He said Bacco caused approximately \$12,800 in road surface damage to Mackinac Trail when it completed work on the snowmobile and multiple use bridge over I-75, north of M-134.

After Clerk Theresa McPherson read aloud the minutes of the Tuesday, May 1, meeting, Commissioner Lester Livermore asked they be amended to include a statement that Chairman Frank Luepnitz ordered

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Drag Strip Is Denied

By Paul Gingras

A controversial plan to build a drag strip in Garfield Township was turned down by the township's planning commission at a meeting Monday, May 14. The main problem was the ecology of the site, which includes wetlands, said Planning Commission Chairman Stephen King, who added that he hopes Thomas and Sharon Ledford of Kaleva, the potential developers, will find a better site for the project in the township.

Mr. King called the decision to exclude the drag strip from the parcel "disappointing."

"It had the potential to be a tremendous economic boost to the area," he said.

The planning commission voted unanimously not to approve a special use permit for building on the site, which is an 80-acre parcel of agricultural land, three miles north of US-2.

Zoning changes would have been needed to legalize the track, but there is no point in going through the zoning process, since the land is not suitable for development, Mr. King said.

The drag strip idea sparked a public reaction, both by proponents and opponents of racing. Proponents focused on recreational opportunities and economic development; opponents argued that the track could cause environmental damage, disrupt farming, and reduce home values. It was also noted that the site is close to Engadine Consolidated Schools.

About 40 people came to the special meeting May 14.

In other business, the township board is waiting to decide whether it will open the Naubinway Marina this summer. The board discussed marina accessibility problems at its Monday, May 21, meeting.

Drifting sand has made the boat launch inaccessible, said Township Treasurer Deb Bennett, and it could be a long process to get a state permit to re-dredge the area. The board has yet to gather information on the cost of re-dredging, but Mrs. Bennett said the township will probably have to pay for the work.

In addition to sand blockage at the boat launch, Mr. King said some of the marina's slips are inaccessible owing to drifting sand. The slips in deeper water remain accessible. Mr. King is a former member of the marina committee.

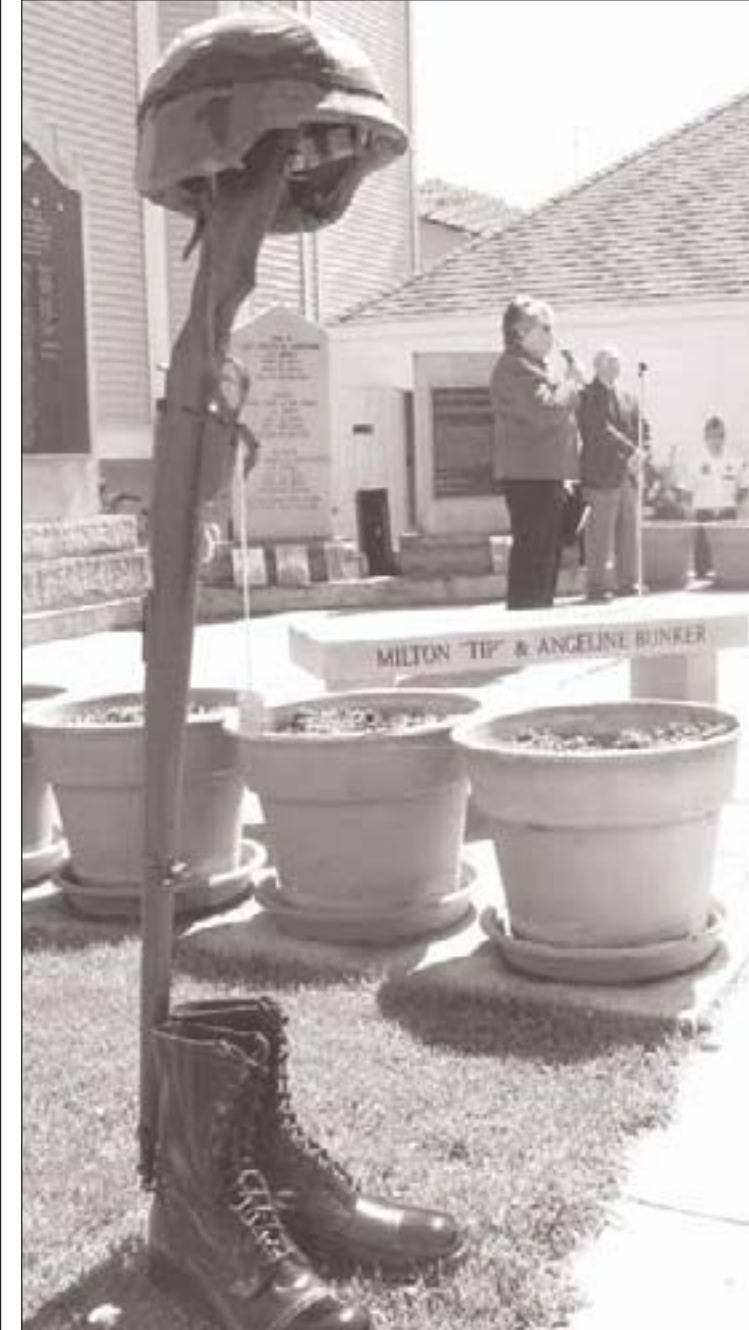
Drifting sand has rendered the marina inaccessible before, and state grants were used to improve it. The township has not received funding to improve the Naubinway Marina this year.

The last time the area was dredged was in 2004.

Redredging should not be needed so often, Mr. King said. The problem is the result of a design

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Remembering the Fallen



The empty helmet, rifle, dog tags, and boots symbolize those who have given their lives in service to the country. Mackinac Island Mayor Margaret Doud addresses a Memorial Day observance crowd in Veterans Memorial Park on the Island Monday, May 28. Also pictured (from left) are Armand "Sm" Horn and Ben Horn. More Memorial Day photographs, page 16