

A Day in the Life of the Mackinac Bridge

One Day's Stats: 13,272 Cross Span, One Driver Assisted, 34 Escorts Provided

**Continued from page 12*

Steve Benko are in the office for less than 30 minutes when they receive two escort calls.

Ms. Bielat attends Western Michigan University and is spending her sixth season at the bridge. She answers a call to escort a cargo truck carrying paint across the bridge. The truck is waiting in Mackinaw City. Once across the bridge, she signals to the driver as she follows with flashing lights. The escort serves to alert other drivers. While crossing the bridge, a second call comes over the radio for

a wide load escort. Wide load crossings are made by appointment, are not allowed to cross on weekends, and only after 6 p.m. during the week.

Ms. Doud and Mr. Benko will lead and follow the transport across in separate vehicles.

The bridge staff also will assist people across the bridge by driving for them, and will transport bicyclists and pedestrians.

"We try to be as accommodating as we can for each other and for our customers," said Ms. Doud, who has worked at the bridge for 21 years. Over that

period, the most driver assists she has had is 15 during one shift.

The strangest driver assist experience, she said, was driving a woman who was moving. Inside the car, in cages, were the woman's 58 pet rats.

They also assist with vehicle breakdowns, Mr. Benko said.

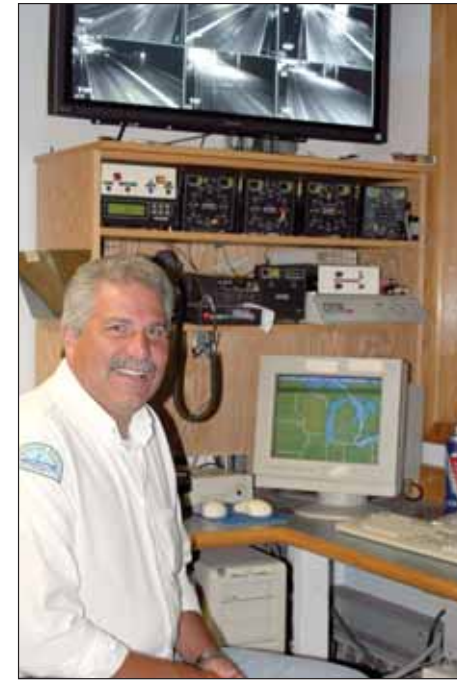
"We've got to keep the bridge clear," he said. "Our main job is on the bridge deck."

The crew also performs security checks and prepares maintenance vehicles for the next day by checking the oil and filling gas tanks.

"I can drive the bridge 40 times a night, for one reason or another," said Mr. Benko.

Ms. Bielat agrees.

"That's what I like about this job," she said. "You have an idea of what you're going to do for the day and then you take it as it comes."



From the operations room, Dan O'Brien, third shift supervisor, begins work at 11:30 p.m. He monitors bridge cameras and computers and watches traffic approaching the toll plaza.



Scott Kinjorski performs nighttime security patrols on the bridge and other Mackinac Bridge Authority property.

"We have our nights where we say it's busy," he said, "but not compared to days."

Mr. O'Brien, who has worked at the bridge since 1994, is stationed in the operations room just east of the toll booths. The room contains computers and bridge camera monitors and offers a direct view of the bridge, toll booths, and vehicles approaching the booths from the north.

Scott Kinjorski, an employee since 1998, provides security patrols, covers for breaks taken by toll collectors, and helps with driver assists and escorts.

Security patrol includes checking bridge signage along US-2 and I-75 near St. Ignace and Mackinaw City. The signs alert motorists to bridge conditions. He patrols Bridge View Park and the bridge. Bridge View Park remains open to vehicles all night, although the building is locked. Mr. Kinjorski sometimes has to remind campers they cannot spend the night in the parking lot.

He patrols north and south areas of the bridge, including the bridge deck.

On this night, with temperatures still in the 70s, the fish flies are hatching. They are food for seagulls. As the flies are drawn to the bridge lights, so are the seagulls seeking a meal. As the patrol car enters the causeway, Mr. Kinjorski slows down as the seagulls take flight, heading in all directions, narrowly avoiding the patrol car.

For those few cars crossing the bridge, a stop at the toll booth serves as a chance to query toll collector Tracey Campbell on the reason for the number of seagulls.

"There's always something going on that they ask about," she said, "it just depends on the time of year it is."

Mrs. Campbell has worked at the bridge for nine years and calls herself a night person. Winter weather doesn't bother her, although mosquitos do. On this night, she keeps the lights down on the inside of her toll booth to deter the bugs.

"I'd rather be here in the wintertime," she said. "Winter does not bother me as long as the heater works, and we have good heaters."

Throughout this day on the Mackinac Bridge, 13,272 vehicles safely crossed the structure. Of those, 6,621 vehicles traveled from the Upper Peninsula to the Lower Peninsula and 6,651 traveled north. One driver from the north was assisted across the span, and 34 escorts were provided by the MBA staff.

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