

Gala Parades, Fireworks Salutes, Dedications Highlight Bridge Milestone

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Grondin, Mackinaw City Village President Robert Heilman, and Mackinac Island Mayor Margaret Doud. Also appearing were honorary committee members William Cochran, the only living member of the Mackinac Bridge Authority from 1957, Prentiss M. Brown, Jr. and Larry Rubin, the first executive secretary of the Authority. Don and Carl Andres led the parade on horseback, dressed in Native American regalia, and marching bands from St. Ignace, Mackinaw City, Indian River, Traverse City, Holland, and Boyne City joined the festivities, as did Fort Michilimackinac soldiers, the Wheelmen vintage bicyclists, Shriners, Portage Players puppets from Curtis, wooden boats from the Les Cheneaux Islands, St. Ignace Fire Department clowns, Mackinac Island cheerleaders, and the Cedarville boys basketball state championship team.

From Friday through Sunday, 5,442 more vehicles crossed the bridge than over the same period last year, about an 8.5% increase, said Bob Sweeney, executive secre-

tary for the Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA). The greatest number of travelers were on Friday, and over the three-day period, 69,510 crossed Mighty Mac, compared to 64,068 vehicles in 2006.

Crowds gathered along beaches on both the north and south shores of the Straits to view evening fireworks, which burst above the road at both sides. The normally quiet Boulevard Drive in St. Ignace was lined with vehicles, which honked horns in approval of each favorite fireworks shot from the MBA property just east of the bridge. From Straits State Park to Lakeside Cemetery and all the way to the point, people filled the shoreline.

Bridge traffic was halted during the fireworks displays, as it was for the jet fly-over at 10:30 that morning.

Mackinac Island sent its own fireworks salute, which ended just as the twin Mackinac Bridge displays began.

Mackinaw City, Mackinac Island, and St. Ignace reported heavy visitor traffic over the weekend.

"I saw 'sorry' and 'no vacancy' signs everywhere I went," said Lynne Piippo, executive director of the St. Ignace Visitors Bureau.

Of the bridge celebration, Cheryl Schlehber, St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce board president, said, "I live here, and I got chills. It was better than you could possibly imagine. What a great tribute to the visionaries who brought it here, to the ironworkers who built it, to the crews that maintain it, and to the people who cross it."

"Anyone who was here for the weekend, how could they not want to come back?" Mrs. Schlehber asked.

Eileen Evers, administrative assistant at the Chamber, agreed.

"The weather was gorgeous and people were ready for a good time," she said. "I think we gave it to them."

Approximately 30 volunteers helped with parade details in St. Ignace Saturday, she said, and 40 additional volunteers worked at the marina for the city's inaugural Fish Feast.

"There were a lot of volunteers, who worked very, very hard and gave up their whole day," said Mrs. Evers. "The events couldn't have happened without their help. It was great."

Mackinaw City was packed with people, reported Greg Hokans, chief of Development and Marketing for Mackinac State Historic Parks, and Marilyn McFarland, executive director for the Mackinaw Area Visitors Bureau.

About 1,500 people paid to watch the fireworks in front of Colonial Michilimackinac and along the beach. He estimated 10 times that number stood outside the

park area.

"It was a huge amount of people, a very appreciative crowd, and a safe event," he said of the Mackinaw City display. "It was well organized by the MBA and Mackinaw City police."

The fireworks were a success and he hopes this will develop a relationship with out-of-town visitors who now will want to return to the area.

"Everyone was just delighted with the display and the beautiful

night," said Mr. Hokans. "It was a great family event."

Ms. McFarland agreed.

"The parade exceeded my expectations, and the weather could not have been prettier," she said.

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Stevenson Recalls Days in Women's Baseball League

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teams from Cedarville, Pickford, Drummond Island, and Rudyard.

"My interest in softball began on the farm," she recalls in her book. "We'd play neighborhood games in our hay field. Every summer evening after our farm chores were finished, we usually had a ball game until dark."

She and her siblings played with their neighbors, the Johnson family, which had 12 children.

In addition to playing ball, Ms. Stevenson assisted the family with all of the chores included with their full-scale, family farm production and maintenance of livestock, hay, produce, and dairy products.

"I remember one day when my father told me I couldn't go play softball until I got all the hay into the barn," Ms. Stevenson writes in her book. "Let me tell you - there was a lot of hay."

When she was 13, she joined the Soo Michigan Lockette team (formerly Soo Chicks), which played in the Canadian League in Ontario, across the St. Marys River. She was playing with the team in the spring of 1954 when she was reading the new softball rule book and saw a professional women's baseball league advertisement.

"Just the thought of playing in the league resulted in me having dreams about the league and what it would be like to play there," she

wrote.

She inquired about the league and the league wrote back, inviting her to try out in Battle Creek. Her coach and mentor, Jack LaPointe of DeTour, said he would take her downstate and pay her expenses for the three-day tryout.

"It was the first time I was away from upper Michigan," she said.

She was one of 106 girls from the Midwest who tried out, and one of six who were chosen for the team. She joined the Grand Rapids Chicks and, to her delight, was assigned the number three, "the same as Babe Ruth," she said.

Ms. Stevenson played a year with the Chicks until the professional women's baseball league was dissolved in 1954, 11 years after it was started during World War II to fill the void left by professional men's baseball, when many of its players went to war. By the 1950s, the war was over, male players returned to the fields, and Americans started losing interest in women's baseball.

Ms. Stevenson was grateful for her experience, and believes there are not enough opportunities today for women to pursue professional careers in baseball. In addition to her permanent status in three halls of fame, she is featured on her own baseball card and in several promotional photographs, and was one of several former All American Girls Professional Baseball League players involved with the 1992 film, "A League of Their Own."

She returned to the Upper Peninsula briefly, and could only find work as a waitress, so she went back to the Grand Rapids area. She remained in the area, eventually working for several years for Michigan Bell Telephone Company, and playing softball, teaching catechism at her Catholic church, and coaching.

The title of her book comes from Coach Jack LaPointe's advice to her about making it around all the bases: "Don't die on third. You must get home."

Ironworker Recounts Job's Challenges

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Above the Straits, winds would be two or three times stronger on the catwalk than they were in St. Ignace, he said.

"At this time of the year, I had to put as many clothes on as I could," he said. "It was so cold up there, you couldn't believe it."

The challenge was to make sure clothing was not loose. To help the men avoid tripping, falling, or getting caught on something, clothes had to be tight fitting, he said.

Safety measures were handled differently in the 1950s, he said. The men each had a four- to five-foot rope they called a lanyard. The lanyard was attached to each worker's belt and the other end tied to an object, when crew members felt it necessary.

"It was the only lifeline we had," he said. "And we attached it when we were in a position we thought we might need it."

Mr. Miller has made Cheboygan his home since 1940.

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