

Ferry, Bridge Workers Vie for Housing Pickford Preschool Given Donation for Rug

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one proposed earlier by Mackinac Island, and nobody in St. Ignace had apparently complained, that plan fell through. The Islanders called for greater city to island "cooperation" by defeat of the St. Ignace plan as well.

Since they were exempted from the passenger surcharge, the fee had nothing to do with a modified state ferry toll that took effect with the spring schedule on April 30. Passenger fares were actually lowered from 35¢ to a quarter. Children under 12 continued to ride free. But the major change was the adoption of a \$2.50 toll for all autos, regardless of their size. Prior to the spring schedule, smaller cars paid a lower fare.

The larger steamboats again ran the scheduled sailings while the diesel icebreaker got a break, but stood by in case she was needed. The Straits of Mackinac was sent to the shipyard in River Rouge for early season maintenance, returning in early May.

As the Highway Department geared up for busy season, returning ferry workers were confronted with an increasing problem. The huge influx of bridge workers and their families competed for what few rooms, apartments, and rental houses were available in the Straits region. The law of supply and demand pushed rents up by as much as double, pricing many returning workers out of the accommodations they'd previously enjoyed. While grocery prices remained steady, prices in restaurants shot up, accompanied by increased prices for other services and some commodities as well.

The ferry workers noted that the crews working on the bridge could better afford the higher prices; they were working for union scale and received overtime for anything over 40 hours, plus premium time for weekends and holidays, and even a night shift differential. So, again, the grass seemed greener over at Merritt-Chapman & Scott, and a

few more ferry workers tried to jump ship. While M-C&S was winding down operations, since the major foundation work would be done that summer, the company still appeared to hire some men from the ferries. Perhaps the most notable "defector" was Norm Paquin, a mate who many, including Superintendent George Lloyd, considered to be about the best boat handler in the fleet.

He took a job piloting an M-C&S tugboat, but he didn't do much tugging. He was assigned to transport the bridge superintendent, special guests, the media, and VIPs on tours of the construction site. Apparently he'd been recruited by M-C&S for his superior skills and knowledge of local waters.

Paquin gave 30-days notice, and Supt. Lloyd had plenty of time to find a replacement. In fact, there's evidence Lloyd may have even recommended him for the job, saying he was welcome to come back to the ferries at any time. But fearful that others might want to follow more quickly, Lloyd quietly asked Commissioner Ziegler to intercede, and persuade M-C&S to make sure the men they hired gave two weeks notice. Ziegler wrote to Bridge Chairman Prentiss Brown, requesting he use his influence with M-C&S for the request.

While this was all done behind the scenes, the story quickly leaked in a small community like St. Ignace. But as is often the case, the gossip was distorted. Ferry workers believed their boss had asked Brown to pressure M-C&S not to hire ferry workers at all, perhaps even fire those now on their staffs. They cited how many workers had tried to switch but had not been hired. They blamed Commissioner Ziegler and Chairman Brown directly.

In truth, Merritt-Chapman & Scott and American Bridge, the contractor that followed, did very little hiring of their own. The bridge contractors hired only union labor and their marine employment was

handled by various Great Lakes union halls, the nearest of which was at the Soo. Since they were under Michigan Civil Service rules, Michigan ferry workers were not union members, so they wouldn't have been considered for most bridge employment, anyway.

By now, the region was divided into two camps. One thought the bridge would be local business salvation, the other felt the loss of the ferries would mean doom.

As rumors and gossip spread, relations were further strained between the ferry workers and their friends on one side, Capt. Lloyd and Commissioner Ziegler in the middle, and even the iconic Senator Brown and bridge supporters on the other.

Former friends no longer spoke with each other. No one resorted to violence, but resentments kindled earlier flared anew, and bitterness about the bridge, the way ferry workers were being treated by their boss in Lansing, and the way the entire matter was handled seethed for years.

Next week: Another strike threat!

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If you have information, photos or State Ferry stories you'd like to share with author Les Bagley, please contact him via e-mail at les@divco.org, or through The St. Ignace News office.



Students of the Wee Wisdom Preschool, trying out their new learning rug with David Firack of the Pickford Community Wellspring, are (back, from left) Elizabeth Storey, Morgan Groover, Sydney Johnson; (front) Taylor Shaw, Lucy Bennin, Emily Roe, Judy Jacobson, Halie Miller, Olivia Batho, Cole Cottle, and Shane Dyer. (Photograph courtesy of Marsha Jones)

Students at the Pickford Wee Wisdom Preschool are enjoying a new "learning rug" printed with numbers and letters. The rug was purchased with grants of \$125 from the Pickford Community Wellspring, an affiliate of the Chippewa County Community Foundation, and \$250 from the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians.

grants for community projects. More information is available by calling David Firack of the Wellspring board at (906) 647-7151.

As the Pickford Community Wellspring endowment grows, there will be more money available for

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Promotions cannot be changed without prior approval by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians Gaming Commission. Promotions can be cancelled at Management's discretion.

Weekly Events

Rapids Lounge Entertainment
Sault Ste. Marie
Thursday Comedy Shows start at 8 p.m.
Dec. 27 - Dan Swartwout & Robin Bach
Live Music starts at 9 p.m. Friday & Saturday
Dec. 28-29 - Touch of Class
New Years Eve - DreamMakers Theater Touch of Class
New Years Eve - Rapids Lounge Dr. Rock

Northern Pines Entertainment
St. Ignace
Wednesday Comedy Shows start at 9 p.m.
Dec. 26 - Dan Swartwout & Robin Bach
Live Music starts at 9 p.m. Friday & Saturday
Dec. 28 & 29 - Showdown
Manistique Comedy Night Every Friday Night
Dec. 28 - Dan Swartwout & Robin Bach
Live Band Friday & Saturday Dec. 28 & 29
Uncle Ugly